DEAR FRIENDS

D. ELLA NIRDLINGER

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A Sequel to "Althea"

BY

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IN

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TO

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OF

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DEAR FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

ROSEMONT, GOOD-BYE.

"How strange it will seem to live in a big city, and ride about on electric cars, and go to school, and—and see Max again," said Lona, with both longing and regret in her voice.

"Oh, I think it will be grand! I'm just wild to live in a city and go to a college as Max does," declared Lee, tramping restlessly up and down the hall, while the others huddled before a bright log fire, for the evening was closing in dreary and cold.

"So am I," agreed Loo.

But Lolly said dismally, "I'll hate to leave Rosemont; no other place will ever seem like home."

"Oh, Loll, wherever we are, if we're only to-

slowly, with many backward glances from tear-filled eyes, drove through the frost-bitten gardens; and when the horses neared the gates Doctor Alvoyd and the boys silently took off their hats, while the girls waved very limp handkerchiefs as a last good-bye to Rosemont; but poor Mrs. Alvoyd hid her face on her husband's shoulder and sobbed a farewell to the dear home she had known so long, and where the precious babies had brought so much joy and love.

"Come, little mother," Dr. Alvoyd said tenderly, "it is *Vale* to the old home and *Ave* to the new. We have been happy here, but have made the plunge now, and perhaps will be even happier in the new."

"That's what I think, too, Papa," Lona said tremulously, but with a hopeful smile.

"I'm sure of it," cried Mrs. Alvoyd brightly, as she wiped the last tear away. "And the question of your education was becoming a very troublesome one for Papa and me; for I never would have let you go to a boarding-school, not if

you had grown up without knowing who the Father of your Country was," she said with a brave smile, though her heart was aching sorely.

"Here we are!" cried Lee, as the carriage drew up to the dock after the long, rather silent drive; and the trip to the North began on the trim little boat that had come to take the old "Marathon's" place. Four o'clock found them seated in the Pullman Limited, in the Jacksonville depot. Althea, Loo, and Lolly squeezed into the seat facing Lee and Lona, while their parents had the section opposite. Scarcely were they settled before a brakeman beneath the window shouted, "All aboard!" waved his hand to the engineer and then with a jerk and groan the train started and rolled slowly out of the station. Lolly held on to Althea, but Lee and Lona bounced about laughing as the car bumped over a switch and then with a rushing swirl crossed a wide avenue.

"Oh, look!" cried Lee excitedly; "this is Florida Place and way down there by the park Frank Pounds lives!" But the train rushed

around another bend, and instead of the pretty street they were looking at unsightly warehouses; then another crook of the steel ribbons and the train cleared the yards and made straight for a dense forest of southern pine, cypress and cedar.

"This looks just like the swamp, doesn't it?" said Loo.

"Yes, sir, down near the wreck," answered Lee, in surprise, for he had thought the "scenery" would begin with the very first five minutes of the trip.

"Isn't it grand," sighed Lona happily, for Lona saw beauty in even swamp scenery.

"I feel just like we were in a book," laughed Loll.

Althea was too excited to talk, but sat beaming upon everybody in a general state of happiness.

As there was nothing very new about the scenery, Dr. Alvoyd took the moment for a nice surprise.

"Here, Lee," he said, "is a letter from Max. It

came this morning, but I kept it thinking you would all enjoy reading it on the train."

"Oh, goody!" cried Loo excitedly.

"Whom is it to? asked Lolly.

"All of you, I reckon," laughed her father, as he handed Lee a plump envelope with a small dark blue and garnet pennant in the corner with which the twins were very familiar now, for Max was a full-fledged freshman of the University of Pennsylvania and proudly proclaimed the fact in every way possible, even to his brilliant stationery.

"And such a nice long one too," said Lona, with a happy sigh, as Lee unfolded the closely-written sheets. As he opened the last page, a Chinese paper doll popped out, and on the back was written, "For Althea."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" they cried in chorus, as Lolly lifted the little man up, and the queer eyes rolled around and around as though the tiny foreigner was having a fit. My! what a merry laugh they had over the comical toy, and many of their

fellow passengers smiled at the lively party of children, who looked like a quartet of Spanish gipsies who had stolen the proverbial "golden-haired" English child; but the children were all unconscious of the admiring glances and settled back with happy faces to hear Max's letter.

University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia, January 15, 18—.

My Dear Frost-bitten Blossoms:—

Rah! Rah! Rah! Hip! Hip! Hurrah! I was so delighted when Mother read the letter saying that you were all coming up here, that I gave our college yell a dozen times. I'll be at the station hours too early, I am so anxious to see you. And I have a fine program made out for your special entertainment. I have a hundred questions I want to ask, but, as they can't be answered until I see you, will wait and "spring 'em" on you myself. May good fortune hurry the day.

Please, don't think that I do not understand how you all feel about leaving beautiful Rose-

mont, for I do. But as it had to be I'm "thinkin' of the marcies," and am so glad that we are to be together again.

> "Friends, friends, best of friends,
> In bright or stormy weather!"

I'm longing to take you through Penn. It is all so splendid. And the free, merry life the American college man leads is almost as good as the circus we had for Althea.

My classmates are fine fellows, every one; and all a boy has to do is to be honest, good-natured, and lively, and he is O. K.'d by the rest—and we do have jolly times after our work is done.

The boys generally go to the theater every Friday evening, and we go into "University Box," as the top galleries of all the Philadelphia theaters are called; and last week some very noted Russian pianist was in one of the boxes right near the stage. Really, he looked like the "wild man from Borneo"; tall, yellow-skinned, and with bushy black hair that stood up straight for

about five inches all around his head. One of the brown-eyed Susans that grow at Rosemont, dressed up in an evening suit, would look lots like him—only prettier. Well, just before the curtain rose he stalked into the box, and one of the boys in our party shouted: "It's mine; I saw it first!" My, how we laughed; and the way Mr. Russian glared up at us would have frightened even the bravest if the height of the opera house had not been between.

There's lots, lots more to tell, but I'm going walking with Mother, so must be off. Don't I bless the wise hands that made so great a pleasure possible! Maudechen is very well, and has met a number of old friends here, so is also quite happy.

This young gentleman from China expressed so great a desire to see my little Okefinikee Blossom that I had to send him by mail. If he has a fit, just stand him on his head. That's a warranted cure.

With heaps of love to you all from Mother

and me, and with a hope to see you without much waiting, I am, ever

Your "dear friend,"

MAX MELODY.

"Isn't it a comfort to have some one we love meet us!" Lolly said, as Lee finished the jolly letter.

"Look! Look!' interrupted Loo with a shout, pointing to the north. Every one gazed in the direction indicated, and saw down in a valley a tiny village, in every house of which beamed a cheerful light.

"It looks like a Christmas card!" said Lona, but while she was speaking the train rushed down the slope, and for a moment the bright picture was lost; and before they knew it they were passing right through the very heart of the "Christmas card," and then away from it again, through miles of forests hushed in early twilight gloom.

"Oh, Lolly," whispered Lona, after their mother had kissed them good-night and fastened

the curtains which hung before their berth; "I feel as if we were boxed just like the oranges are when they go North."

"Isn't it the queerest place you was ever in?" Loll whispered back.

"Let's put our pillows up next to the windows and look out," suggested Lona; "the moon is as bright as can be and it will be loads of fun."

"That's what we're doing!" came in a whisper from the boys' berth just next to theirs, and the four enjoyed the best part of traveling by night looking out on a sleeping world that rushes by, whirling as fast to the south as you do to the north. But before the twins knew they were sleepy, the dark eyes closed, and the moon smiled softly to herself as she traveled along with them, and in fact never lost sight of the little travelers, until they awoke hundreds of miles from the spot where they had decided to stay awake and watch her.

"All aboard for breakfast at Raleigh, the capital of North Carolina!" sang Dr. Alvoyd, as

the children gathered in their parent's section the next morning, after having bumped and jostled about for an hour trying to dress.

"Don't you feel kind of queer?" asked Loo, as he and Loll followed the others into the dining car.

"Yes; so shaky and dizzy."

"How strange it is to be calmly eating breakfast in a pretty dining-room while we're racing along at the rate of forty miles an hour," laughed Mrs. Alvoyd.

"Papa, I wish dis twain woud hold till—till I det a jink," declared Althea, vainly trying to guide a trembling glass to her lips.

"Well, you had better jump off, take your drink, and then jump back again; for I don't believe I could make the engineer stop," laughed Dr. Alvoyd.

Althea regarded him gravely for a moment, then answered solemnly,—and I'm afraid the others echoed the thought in their hearts,—"I don't fink I like twaveling!"

But when at noon the train stopped just outside a pretty town in Virginia, and they all tramped about in the open air, marveling at the leafless skeleton trees and withered grass, the delightful thrill of novelty seized them again, and as every hour brought to their view strange and stranger sights they never complained of the weariness from being quiet so long.

Just at twilight they passed through Washington, and the children scarcely breathed as the train swept around the city and their father pointed out the places of interest as they rolled along.

"There is the Capitol!" he announced as the graceful, snowy dome flashed into view.

"It looks like an immense white angel with wings outspread to protect the whole country," observed Lona thoughtfully.

"So it does, daughter," answered Dr. Alvoyd. "The Capitol of the United States is a pure white angel to the oppressed from every clime."

The train seemed to tremble on the crest of the

hills before plunging down and hiding the beautiful city; but scarcely had the twins turned back from their last view when a shout from Loo again brought them to his window.

"Oh, look! look at all this white stuff over everything!" he cried.

"It's snow!" exclaimed Lee, who, while he had never seen it before, knew at once from his reading what the "white stuff" was.

Every one talked at once as they crowded nearer the windows to see all they possibly could of the sparkling treasure that is more wonderful than all the wealth of which Aladdin dreamed.

"I wish we could see some come down," observed Lona.

"Why, sister, doesn't it grow dere?" Althea asked in surprise, wondering where such a great white sheet could come from. Every one laughed, but the train whizzed into Baltimore, and the snow was lost for awhile, but they met it again in the hills of Pennsylvania.

"Come, chicks; gather your traps and have

your hats and coats ready to slip on, for we are nearly there," said Mrs. Alvoyd, when it became too dark to see even in the strange snow-glow outside, and the porter came in to light the queer little lamps in the roof of the car. The children watched him and the flashes of lights along the road with drowsy interest until the conductor called,

"Next station will be Phil-adel-phia!" when they were wide awake in a moment and joined in the general hurry to leave the car.

"Come, pet, come," coaxed Mrs. Alvoyd, leaning over poor Althea, who, worn out with the unusual excitement of the long trip, had quietly gone to sleep.

"Come, little sister, let brother carry you," and Lee took her from his mother, and in a moment more they were standing in the noisy uproar of a great city's railroad station.

"Here they are!" cried a familiar boyish voice, and Max, closely followed by his mother, greeted the dear friends from far-away Florida.

"We came only to welcome you," explained Mrs. Melody, as she kissed Mrs. Alvoyd tenderly, "for I know you are worn out from the long trip. Max attended to your request, Doctor, and suite 407 is awaiting you at the S——. So, good night. Come, son, we'll see you all early in the morning, and have a pleasant 'reminiscing.'"

"Good night!"

"Good night!"

"Come early, Max!"

The carriages parted, and Althea and the twins began life in the Quaker City by a rapid drive over asphalted streets to a brilliantly lighted hotel.

CHAPTER II.

PHILADELPHIA.

"WELL, babes, we have rented a house!" announced Mrs. Alvoyd cheerfully, as she came into one of the deep alcoves of the hotel parlor late one afternoon a few days after their arrival, and found the children grouped near a large window watching the gay scenes on ice-covered Broad street, in the mysteries of an early winter twilight.

"Oh, have you?" they cried in chorus, crowding about her, as she sank wearily into a chair, for she had had two days' experience in house-hunting, and had found it a tiresome task.

"Near Max's?" asked Lee, eagerly.

"No, not really near, and yet not very far either," she answered, as Althea nestled close to her.

"Please, tell us all about it," pleaded Lona, gently taking off her mother's bonnet, that she might rest her head against the soft cushions.

"Children, it's an old-fashioned brick house, facing a pleasant little park. There is nothing like our Rosemont about it, except perhaps the chimneys," she said smiling, though her lips trembled; "but," she went on, with brave earnestness, "when all our pretty furniture and curtains are in place it will be a dear, cozy nest. And we must make it so—for father's sake. Never let him see how much we miss our beautiful home, our friends and wealth; he feels deeply enough about it and needs us to cheer him, for the work he is undertaking is something he does not like. I can trust you each to help me make it happy, can't I?" she asked in a tone of tender appeal that made the children very proud of her confidence.

"Mama, the battle cry of the knights was, 'For God, our Lady, and the Right!' Let ours be, 'For Father, our Lady, and Home!'" cried Lee

lovingly, for he saw plainer than even Lona how hard it was for his gentle mother to meet the new life bravely, and his boyish heart went out to her in a great desire to help make it as easy as possible.

Mrs. Alvoyd saw in a moment how the fancy pleased the children, for their faces had brightened marvelously at his paraphrasing the shibboleth of their favorite heroes to their own needs, and she said fervently, "With that as our motto, my son, all the real happiness of the world can be won; so let us be true to it, and try to make the little house always *home*."

And from that hour, Lee lead the crusade for happiness, and valiantly carried it straight into the heart of the red brick house that they entered in a week's time; and its solemn old walls suddenly woke up and found that they really could echo merry childish laughter very well, and not half try. The first days in the little house were very busy ones, but everybody lent a hand, and soon the low, square room facing the park looked

like the Rosemont library transplanted. Everyone's easy-chair stood in a comfortable place, from Dr. Alvoyd's deep leather morris, to Althea's little wicker rocker. Mrs. Alvoyd's desk and old-fashioned work-basket stood in one corner; Lona's stand of pet ferns and roses peeped brightly through the dainty curtains of the bay-window; the book cases and broad couch looked across to a log gas grate, and *Home* was written on every well-loved object in the cosy drawing-room and library combined. All the beautiful heirlooms of Rosemont stood in stately grandeur in the long, narrow parlor downstairs, and faithful Mammy Clare, whom pleadings nor commands had been able to turn from her determination to follow the fortunes of "her babies" to the cold North, reigned supreme in the simple dining-room and strange kitchen that had an iron stove "sot right in de wall ob de building."

At three o'clock on the fourth day Lee's curly head popped into the girls' room, and he said

coaxingly: "Say, Lon, let's take a walk and see what it looks like around here."

"All right; just wait until I hang up Mama's picture and we'll all come."

"Take me, Lee," pleaded Althea, who was holding tacks for Lona. "I want to see the 'leclic tars too."

"Well, run and get your coat and bonnet and tell Mama we're going," answered Lee kindly; and in a few moments the five stood shivering on the front steps.

"We'll have to walk fast if we want to keep warm; so let's go right across the park and see what that big white building is over on the corner," said Lee, as they started off down the walk.

"Maxey, Maxey, here we is!" cried Althea, waving her hands, as Max in a handsome, roomy sleigh came jingling up to the curb.

"Hello! Hello!" they shouted as he sprang out and came running towards them.

"Come on for a spin, youngsters," he cried merrily. "The snow never lasts very long in

Philadelphia, and to-morrow it may be all gone. Run in and tell Aunt Tude we'll be back early, Loo."

Mrs. Alvoyd, in answer to a gleeful shout from that young gentleman, came to the window and smilingly waved her consent, and the sleigh started off with the merry party tucked under the fur robes. The horses carefully picked their way through the maze of sleighs, wagons, and 'leclic tars" that Althea declared looked like "bid fire-buds;" but, as soon as they turned into Broad street, were off with a dash, and everyone began talking at once and calling attention to special points of interest.

"Girls, look! There's H.... College where Father is going to be," exclaimed Lee, as they passed a high red building, and in answer to Max's look of inquiry he explained proudly, "Father has accepted the Chair of Anatomy there."

"Good!" Max exclaimed, with much interest; for he had longed to know where "his doctor"

was to enter the new field, but had not liked to ask.

"Here are the locomotive works," Max went on happily, as the sleigh passed the glare of a mammoth furnace, and the stalwart, grimy workmen smiled sooty smiles at the merry faces peeping at them over the smoke.

"What is the matter?" cried Lolly, in alarm, as a mounted policeman, shouting wildly, dashed past and people and vehicles flew to right and left.

The party in the sleigh understood, and became frantic with excitement, too, when the Fire Department came flying up the street in all its clanging, crimson glory. Althea clung to Max, while the others stood up in a frenzy of delight, as the chemical engine and hose reel, with shrill whistles of alarm, swept by. It was the first time the Alvoyd children had ever seen the approach of the Red Angels of Mercy, and they never forgot it.

"Johnny Brown! That was the most wonderful

sight I ever saw," cried Lee, sitting down with a sigh of regret that they had passed so quickly.

"Jingo!" cried Max, as the sleigh turned on to a side street, and they could see flames bursting from the roof of an immense building about a block away.

"Oh, look at the fire coming out of the windows!" screamed Lona, in terror.

"Max, the fireman are going right into the flames," and Loo turned perfectly white at what he supposed was a fearless display of heroism.

"Loo, Loo, what are dey going do det burned up for?" wailed Althea, wringing her mittened hands in dismay.

"They'll not get hurt, pet," explained Max soothingly, as he took the trembling child on his lap, while the others stood and watched with fascinated eyes until the last spark was dead; when they suddenly discovered that it had grown dark, and Max gave the word for home, and in a few moments Althea, who was tired and nearly frozen, was being comforted in Mrs. Alvoyd's

arms. In breathless excitement, everyone talking at once, the twins related the wonderful adventure, and wound up by declaring that "they were going to every fire they could as long as they lived," which I know they certainly tried to do.

Max stayed for tea and the whole evening was spent in planning for to-morrow, the great day upon which the children were to enter school life: the girls going to the convent on the Avenue, and the boys to the Institute of Technology. They were all delighted with the prospect, except Loll, who dreaded going among strangers, and she sat quietly on her father's knee while the others, even Althea, talked merrily about the fun it would be to know so many young people.

"Lee, what course are you going to take?" Max asked finally; for he knew the prospectus of the Institute by heart, having gone over it himself at the time when there was the fear that his youth would keep him out of Penn, although his German education and year of tutoring had given him the knowledge required for entering the Law School.

"Domestic Science and Drawing," Lee answered, with a beaming face; for such had been the final decision after much serious thought and council.

"So am I," said Loo; "only instead of drawing I'm going to take up the first steps in advanced Physiology. Dad said one of us had to be a Doctor, on general principles; and as Lee would rather draw than eat, the lot of sawbones fell to me," and they all laughed; for Loo's desire to see the inside of things was a common joke in the family from the time when as a little fellow he had skillfully opened a valuable music box to find out where the "tjunes" came from; and recently dissected a Brazilian bug, found in his father's study, and came in to lunch with the triumphant announcement "that it had two eyes and six legs," all of which interesting facts his father already knew, and didn't relish the superfluous knowledge at the sacrifice of a valuable member of his entomological collection. But like all people devoted to science he took the depredations very calmly, declaring that Loo's desire for knowledge

was most praiseworthy, and only stipulated that hereafter he keep the field of his labors in the gardens.

"You girls won't have to make out courses, will you?" Max asked, when Dr. Alvoyd finished the history of his unfortunate South American beauty.

"No, not exactly," answered Lona. "I'm going right on as Mr. Morgan advised—only I do want to take drawing, too."

"Why, Lon, do you still draw houses like you used to?" laughed Max, thinking of the tipsy views of Court Ledge and Rosemont with which she used to adorn her letters.

"Yes, I do! I just love to outline buildings," declared Lona quickly, but with an anxious glance at her mother, who answered it with a grave shake of her head and a rather hurt glance; and Dr. Alvoyd changed the subject by saying teasingly to Loll, "Sister, if you make as much noise at school as you're doing now, they'll put you in jail," and he softly patted the slender

white hands that were tightly holding to one of his. Loll had suddenly commenced to fail and that fact had been one of the strongest arguments in the hasty decision to come North; for, with his great knowledge, Dr. Alvoyd saw that to save their little girl a great change would be needed.

"Oh, papa, I don't want to go! Lona will be higher than me, and I'll be all alone," Lolly sobbed, hiding her face on his coat and trembling with fear.

"Sister," cried Althea, running over and putting her arms about Loll, "I'll be dere and will tay right by you," she comforted lovingly.

"Why, girlie, just think if you stayed at home for even a week Loo would get ever so far ahead," exclaimed Max earnestly, for both Dr. and Mrs. Alvoyd looked grave, and he knew that he had great influence with Loll.

"Lucille," said her mother gently, "Mama wants you to do her a favor—will you?"

"Yes'm," she answered dolefully.

"Then promise me you will go to school with

Lona and Althea to-morrow and go for just one week, and then, if you don't wish to, you won't have to return."

"All right," consented Loll miserably; and after the boys had taken Max to the door and she was being tucked in her mother kissed her good-night, saying tenderly,

"Mama wants you to be very brave in the morning, little daughter, and begin the happy life at the convent, that I know you will soon learn to love, with a bright smile and sunny heart."

"I'll try, Mama, try and try," whispered poor Loll wofully.

"That's right, darling; then I know everything will be well," and Mrs, Alvoyd gave her one last kiss, and turning to Lona said gaily, "Come into my room for a moment, daughter," but the bright tears in her mother's eyes made her ask in anxious surprise, as she sat down on the couch and fondly drew her mother beside her. "What is it, Mama?"

"Leona, I have a plan that may keep Lollie at

school, but I'll need your help, dear; we both will have to make a sacrifice, but I am afraid for her sake we must," answered her mother seriously.

"Mama, I think Lollie is acting very strange, don't you?" interrupted Lona.

"Yes, but she is not well; and father is anxious to see if another great change like going to school will not help her. She is afraid to go alone, so I thought if you would be willing to enter her class, instead——"

"Oh, mother!" cried Lona, looking at her reproachfully. "Go back a whole year!"

"I was afraid you would feel so, Lona, and the only consolation I can offer you is that we will manage to let you take drawing so that you can fill in the extra time on that."

"Why, Mama, I would never catch up with Lee again," pleaded Lona, a world of regret in her voice.

Mrs. Alvoyd remained silent for a moment, looking sadly at the fire, then drawing Lona close in her arms she whispered brokenly, "I know it,

dear, but we may not always have Lollie to take care of and ——"

"Oh, Mama, what do you mean? Is Lollie really sick?" cried Lona in alarm, sitting up very straight.

"Lona, we don't know what is the trouble with her; but for a long time she has not been like herself and this strange fear of school is a very grave symptom in a case like hers."

"Oh, Mama, if anything were to happen to Loll it would kill Loo—and all the rest of us, too," moaned Lona, in her ignorance of sorrows not knowing that they seldom kill.

Her mother's answer was a low sob that quickly brought the girl back to herself, and throwing her strong young arms about her Lona whispered comfortingly, "I'll go in her class, Mama, and keep her lively, and father can surely make her well again. She was never quite as strong as the rest of us, but she ran as fast as I did across the park to-day," she added hopefully.

"Thank you, dear heart," answered her mother;

"if you can only make her like school and keep her interested I know it will effect the cure papa hopes for."

So with their arms about each other Lona and her mother talked of their hopes and fears, and thus the girl received the first inheritance of being a woman—a share in a sorrow that must be borne cheerfully, patiently, and silently.

CHAPTER III.

SCHOOL.

SHORTLY after breakfast the next morning the boys' curly heads popped into their sisters' room and Lee cried happily, "Althea, don't let them put you in the graduating class; you won't like it!"

"Loll, keep the colors flying," sang Loo encouragingly, and then with well filled book straps they started bravely off with their father.

"Are you ready, daughters?" asked Mrs. Alvoyd, coming into the room where the girls were putting the finishing touches to their pretty black sailor suits, while Althea, perched at the foot of the bed in her short white dresses, looked like a snowball.

"Yes, mother, just our hats and coats;" and then the daughters of Rosemont took, for the first time, the walk that was to change the whole current of their lives.

Lolly's fear returned with double force, as they waited in the quiet dimness of the convent parlor; but it was gradually dispelled under the gentle questioning and sweet smile of Mother Roberta. Althea was soon disposed of, and the girls laughed merrily as she marched proudly away to the kindergarten to begin the climb up the steep hill of knowledge; but the way looked sunshiny and pleasant to the littlest Rosemont blossom as she shyly took her place among the other babies playing in a circle of bright red balls.

In the few moments after seeing her settled, the girls said good-bye to their mother, and timidly followed Madam to the bright classroom upstairs.

"You are both in the same *cour*, so that will be pleasant," she remarked, as they walked toward a door at the head of a hall, and before Lolly could correct the seeming mistake the nun opened it, and the alarming spectacle of the black-gowned girls rising to their feet took away not only her thoughts, but her breath as well, and she stood

silent and pale beside blushing Lona, while the nun said kindly:

"My dear girls, I am bringing you two new classmates, Lucille and Leona Alvoyd. Tullia," she said turning to a pretty young girl of about sixteen, who wore a broad blue ribbon over her shoulder, "to you I leave the task of introducing the little girls to their *cours*. Give them the desk next the window, and see that everything is made clear and pleasant for them," and, nodding graciously, she returned to her class.

Scarcely were they seated at the old-fashioned double bench, than the bell rang for recess, and while the others filed out, Tullia came over and asked sweetly, "Which of you is Lucille and which Leona?"

"Sister is Lucille, and I am Lona," answered that young lady, rather timidly.

"Then won't you come down into the garden and meet the other girls? There are just twenty of us and I am sure you will like everyone."

"I think so too," replied Lona, getting up

quickly, her merry brown eyes smiling frankly into the quiet blue ones of the older girl.

"And what do you think of us, Miss Silence?" asked a laughing voice, and, turning, Lolly met the smiling gaze of a little girl about her own age who had come into the classroom from a door at the rear and unobserved had listened to the conversation, and noticing the frightened look and white, sealed lips of the younger girl, and guessing the cause, had impulsively put her arm about her, as she made her laughing speech.

"I think I'd like — you," answered Loll, frankly, for some reason not a bit timid, and very earnestly.

"Well, Gay, your mischief was rewarded better than all my politeness, for I couldn't get even a look from Lucille, and here she tells you she likes you on the spot," laughed Tullia merrily. "So I'll ask you to chaperone her through the introductions to your *cour*. Where are the girls?"

"At the end of the garden. I saw them from the music-room windows. Come on, we'll lead

the way," and tucking Loll's arm through hers, Gabriella ran pell mell down the steps. And to her amazement, Loll did not find the presentations hard a bit—for marching up to a group of little girls Gay broke all restraint by making a deep bow and saying drolly, "Young ladies of *cour* B., permit me to introduce into your society young Miss All Aboard — oh, pardon, (as Professor Genelli says,) I mean Alvoyd!" And in a few moments Lolly was telling them all about "Lucillian, my twin" and dear Rosemont; while she listened to a heart-rending story of a much dreaded musical at which they all had to play that evening. Her gentle sympathy for them, and theirs for her over leaving her beautiful home, soon made them great friends — as "like likes like" and sympathy is always common ground.

Tullia took Lona to a group of older girls, and she too was soon listening to the same story of nervousness and fright among the performers, and by the time the bell rang for class, the sweet spirit of friendliness, to be found only among

convent girls, had made her feel quite well acquainted. The short session after recess was almost over when little feet were heard pattering up the steps, and in a moment Althea stood in the doorway and announced simply, "Lolly, I'se doing home — tum on." But a gale of delighted laughter made her glance at the room full of girls in reproachful surprise, and slipping up to Lona hide her face in her lap, and she really didn't find courage to speak again until they were safely on their way home. When they came within sight of the house they saw their mother and the boys waiting for them on the steps, and in a moment, all talking at once, they were busily engaged in recounting the experiences of the day.

"Just think, as we stepped from the car in front of the Institute, who should be standing on the corner waiting for us, but Max," exclaimed Lee, "and he went over with us and showed us through the whole building, and introduced me to two fellows he knows, who are in my art class."

"Yes, and while they were up in the studios Professor Baker took me into the Chemistry Hall, and I'm the youngest in the class," cried Loo, swelling up with pride.

"Oh, Mama, that's the grandest building! And if I work right hard Professor Toms says I ought to graduate in two years. Then I'm going to enter some architect's office and make that work my profession." And Lee pranced about, feeling that both feet were safely planted on the path to wealth and fame.

"Why, LeRoy Alvoyd, I thought we were going to open an office *together,* with a big gilt sign — L. & L. Alvoyd, architects," reminded Lona in a disappointed voice.

"Oh, Lon, we were kids when we planned that. A girl oughtn't to earn her own living, especially in the North," responded Lee loftily.

"Well I like that. But I don't care; if you won't go into business with me I'll open a shop of my own," retorted Lona hotly.

"Come, children, come; don't quarrel about

the future. It is the most uncertain thing in the world. You two remind me of a story my father used to tell of an old, old lady and gentleman who grew cross at one another because they could not agree upon the college to which they would send the son *they didn't have,"*

"But Mama, would you let Lona go down town to business every day — and work?" demanded Lee, not a bit abashed by the old lady and gentleman story.

"Lee, I can't say 'I would not,' for there is no telling what may come to you children if anything were to happen to Papa or me. A young girl with a sweet, pure heart may enter the business world and be as much of a lady as though princes courted her in her father's mansion. Both you and Lona have been blessed with a decided talent for drawing and I really wish her to study Art with the intention of having it prove useful at a time when perhaps she will have the world to face alone," answered his mother very earnestly.

"Why, if anything were to happen, don't you think Loo and I would take care of the girls?" demanded Lee almost reproachfully.

"Certainly you would, but perhaps with all your love and good will other assistance might be necessary."

"Of course," interrupted Lona, "if Loo is a doctor and you and I architects, we would take care of the whole family."

"And I a lawyer to help Lolly out of her quarrels with everybody, would just round out the quartet," laughed Max who had come in unnoticed, so interested had the children been in their mother's view of working girls.

"I want to do some-sings too," cried Althea, coming over to Max with a dolly in one hand and its "nighty" in the other.

"Well, you can stay home and help Lolly take care of the house," Max answered soberly, for Althea was never slighted in family counsels, or made to feel that "children should be seen and not heard" as is so often done, and tender

childish hearts made to ache with a feeling that they're always in the way.

"No, I wouldn't," she replied, looking up at him happily. "I'd sing songs all day long, like the dirl in Lona's book." And little did any of the young hearts think that of all their fondly cherished plans the littlest Blossom's would be the nearest realized.

"Just listen, Mama," she went on, running over to her mother, "we learned a song to-day," and she sang in her soft baby treble.

> "'Up, up in the sky, the little birds fly,
> Down, down in their nests, the little birds rest!'"

"Isn't that drand?" she demanded excitedly.

"Just beautiful; what is the rest of it?" asked Mrs. Alvoyd, smiling down on the child.

"I know the west, but I can't demember it," replied Althea merrily, joining in the children's laugh at the new way of expressing forgetfulness.

"And you, little daughter," asked Mrs. Alvoyd, holding out one hand to Lolly, "how was the first day with you?"

"I liked it, Mama," answered Loll quietly. "Gabriella Merrill is so nice. I do hope she'll like me."

"Well, if she doesn't she'll never be one of the elect," teased Max who had had grave doubts about Lolly's first day's experience; but if she already liked one of her little companions he knew the rest of the way would be easy.

"Then you'll go back to-morrow?" continued her mother anxiously.

"Yes, please. But Lona, how is it that you're in *Cour* B.? Why, you are way ahead of Loo and me," Lolly asked suddenly, and Lona replied with a bright glance at her mother, "Mother Roberta asked me after recess how it happened that we were in the same class when I'm two years older than you, and I told her a secret that Mama and I had; and she said that *Cour* B. consisted of three classes — A, C, and D; so that we could be in the same room, and have the same desk, if we wished, and still be three grades apart. Oh, I was so happy!" she added, kissing her

mother, with her eyes bright with thankful tears that the sacrifice, so willingly accepted, had not been necessary.

Doctor Alvoyd noted with thankful heart, when he came in later in the evening, the soft color in Lolly's pale cheeks and said to his wife in a relieved voice when the children left the room with Max, "It was a hard trial for her, darling; but I think it was a wise one."

"I know it was!" she answered in a voice full of courage.

The next morning, when the girls came into the school-yard, they found Tullia and Gay watching for them.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came early," exclaimed Gay. "We are going to have a General History contest this afternoon and I want to show you what to do, for you both will surely be chosen!"

"Gay, don't chatter so — listen, girls, I'll explain it to you. Every two weeks we have a contest between Classes A and C in some general subject; this time it is the history of the Civil

War, and I'm captain on one side, and Grace Bell on the other. At half past two we take our places and choose forces. To-day is Class C's turn to choose first, so I'll ask you, and then Lolly, unless Grace takes her; and I don't think she will, for Louise Choteau is her chum and, of course, she'll come first. Then I'll ask Grace the first question, like 'What was the real, and what the imaginary cause, of our War of 1860?' Then if she can't answer, the next girl takes it, and so on down the line. Madam Roberta keeps the score and every miss counts the opposing side one."

At recess most of the girls were studying dates; but Gay, who was the best history scholar in her class, went about mischievously asking and answering questions in the same breath, until two of the older girls kidnapped her, and she was seen no more until class was called. Then she came to her place with such a look of wrathful enjoyment that everyone laughed, and though she kept a lofty silence her eyes were fairly dancing with mischief.

"Come back early," she called after Loll as they parted at noon; but the girls could not find Althea, and after looking for her all through the yard decided she must have gone home; but when they arrived she had *not* returned.

"Girls, you must never leave her again," cried their mother anxiously, when they came in and explained that they thought she had come home early. "Eat your lunch with papa, and if she is not here in a few moments, I'll go over after her myself. Oh, here she comes!" she exclaimed from the window, "but what in the world can be the matter? She's crying as though her heart would break. Why, my baby, what is it?" she cried, when Althea a moment later burst into the room sobbing wrathfully.

"Mama, I don't fink dat teacher is nice!" she wailed.

"Why, darling, what did she do to you?" asked her nother, hastily unbuttoning her little coat, while the whole family gathered around in dismay.

"Why — why — she makes dust as much fuss if I leave — *one* — little — letter — out — of a — word — as if I left out free — or four!" answered Althea, with a big sob; but the shout of gay laughter that greeted the story of her wrongs brought a smile to even her woebegone face, and Dr. Alvoyd caught her up saying gaily, "Well, she must be a funny teacher; and if that's the way she is going to treat you — we'll just have to see about it, that's all. Making a fuss about leaving *one little letter* out of a word. Next time she does it, Althea, you just spell 'bead' at her, and leave out the *e*!"

"Papa, you musn't tell baby to be naughty," reproved Mrs. Alvoyd seriously. "Madam is right, dear. Every little letter means something special in a word, and you must learn them, every one."

Althea looked at her with wide-eyed dismay, and said slowly, "My — dracious!"

And "doing to tool" did not seem so "plendid" just then, I fear. But the afternoon was a

triumph for Lona and Professor Morgan's rules; for at the end of the History contest she stood alone on Tullia's side, and answered down Iva Black, the last of Grace's girls, with the question:

"Who formed the Cabinet of the Confederate States of America, and where was its first meeting held?"

Iva looked at her blankly for a moment, then observed good-naturedly, as she walked to her place. "If you know *that* yourself, Lona, you ought to get *two* prizes."

"I'll be satisfied with one," Lona answered blushingly, as she softly named the eight Southern men who had composed the basis of the rival republic, which, had it triumphed, would have broken forever the heart of our Union.

"President, Jefferson Davis; Vice-President, Alexander H. Stevens; Secretary of State, R. Toombs; Secretary of the Navy, S. R. Mallory; Attorney-General, J. P. Benjamin; Secretary of the Treasury, C. G. Memminger; Secretary of War, L. P. Walker; and Post-Master General,

J. H. Reagan. The first meeting of the first Confederate Cabinet was held in the City Hall of Montgomery, Alabama."

"Good!" exclaimed Madam, with an encouraging smile, as she held out Lona's reward, a little picture of Stonewall Jackson, the brilliant commander who was the heart and soul of the Confederates in the field where the greatest glory was won; and as Lona turned from her teacher's desk three girlish voices exclaimed admiringly, "Madam, Lona ought to be captain of the geography contest for next time!"

"You are right," Madam answered sincerely; "that was a beautiful recitation," and Lona was so overcome by being chosen for the post of honor that she could only bow her thanks.

CHAPTER IV.

TROUBLE.

"MISSY, dere is a lady down in the parlor what wants to see you, but she wouldn't give me a caird," announced Mammy Clar suspiciously, coming into the library one afternoon in early March, and finding her mistress busily writing.

"Oh, Mammy, I reckon it's an agent for books or diamonds, and I am so busy," she laughed.

"No 'tain't, honey, she done come in a kerriage," answered Mammy impressively.

Mrs. Alvoyd arose and, carefully closing her desk, said quietly.

"I'll go down," and in a few moments she walked into the parlor to find an elegantly dressed gray-haired woman with a sharp pale face and cold blue eyes awaiting her.

"You wish to see me?" she asked, in her sweet, gentle way.

"Are you Mrs. Irving Alvoyd?" inquired her visitor calmly.

"Yes."

"Perhaps you have heard of me? I am Rebecca Wayne."

For a moment Mrs. Alvoyd looked at her blankly, then, shaking her head, said smiling:

"No, I do not recollect you."

"Well, of course, you never *met* me before; but you surely knew my brother who married the girl your father raised."

"You don't mean you're Althea's — Althea's *aunt,*" interrupted Mrs. Alvoyd, her mind for a moment confusing the girl friend Althea — and her baby.

"I believe I stand in that relation to my brother's child," replied Miss Wayne bluntly.

"You — you wish to see the little girl?" asked Mrs. Alvoyd, a terrible fear coming into her heart.

"Madam, I fully understand what a trouble and expense, perhaps, the child has been to you

these last three years; and I think that can be readily adjusted between us for whatever amount you ask. But I have decided that it will be more proper for me to raise my niece than perfect strangers," Miss Wayne said, in a cool, disagreeable manner, her sharp eyes watching every look of amazement and anger that swept over little Mrs. Alvoyd's face as she listened to the impertinent speech.

Mrs. Alvoyd sat silent for a moment staring at her visitor with her blue eyes blazing in a way that would have astonished the children, had they been there just then, though she replied calmly:

"Miss Wayne, I do not know what your object is in making yourself known to us now. But, if you have any idea that we would ever permit you to take Althea from us, you are mistaken. For outside of our love for our baby — the child is ours by adoption."

"I was afraid some sentimental member of the family might raise objection to my claim, so I fortified myself with certain knowledge and

counsel, and found that you have not, as yet, had those adoption papers transferred from the State of Florida to the State of Pennsylvania; and further that you are in a certain measure in different financial circumstances than when living at Rosemont, and in view of my greater possibility of advantage to the child she would assuredly be awarded to me, if you care to take the trouble to go to law over the matter."

Mrs. Alvoyd arose and said quietly, though her heart was beating wildly: "Miss Wayne, I think you are making a mistake. But I really cannot give you any answer without my husband's direction, so if you will give me your address, we will call upon you this evening — and I think make this very hard question seem less cruel."

"Does that mean that I am not to see my niece?" exclaimed Miss Wayne, with almost a threat in her voice.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Alvoyd, smiling at her quick suspicion. "Althea is at school, but she will be at home shortly if you wish to wait; only

I must ask you to respect my wishes and do not now tell her who you are. I must see Dr. Alvoyd before I take a step so decisive. We will——"

She was interrupted by the closing of a door, and Althea's silvery voice ringing out,

"Mama, Mama, where is you?"

"Here, dear," answered Mrs. Alvoyd, going into the hall and holding out her hand to the child, who to her loving eyes never looked more lovely than when she came running through the entry, her rosy face wreathed in smiles and her golden curls all atumble.

"Dust look what Madam gave me," she cried, holding out a small silver medal with a happy laugh.

"It is very nice," said her mother, "but come into the parlor, dear I have — a — a — lady to see you," and she led the little girl in, saying gently,

"Miss Wayne, this is our baby, Althea!"

Her aunt looked at her with unkind, critical eyes and said sharply: "Seeing that her features

are certainly not Wayne, there is great reason of hope that her character is. How old are you, child?" she asked suddenly, looking shrewdly at Althea, who tightened her clasp in Mrs. Alvoyd's hand in a frightened way, but answered politely, "I'm berry nearly five," but catching the frown on the visitor's face, added winningly, "But I'm most a lady, like Mama."

"Do you go to school?" Miss Wayne continued in a sharp voice, and with a triumphant look at Mrs. Alvoyd.

"Yes'm, and I can spell eighteen words, just exactly right, for Mama teached me," Althea answered, not knowing just how to entertain an ill-tempered guest, for the dearth of smiles on the sharp face puzzled her blithe little heart.

"Would you like to take a nice drive out in the park with me?" Miss Wayne asked with sudden sweetness taking the child by the hand and attempting to draw her gently from Mrs. Alvoyd. But before Althea could reply, her mother answered quietly:

"I do not like the children to drive in the late afternoon; they are hardly acclimated."

Miss Wayne's thin lips closed with almost a snap, and she rosé immediately.

"Very well," she said frigidly, "I understand, and respect my hostess's privileges; but I'll expect you and your husband at eight o'clock this evening. My address is 'The Pocantico.' "

"Thank you, Miss Wayne," Mrs. Alvoyd replied softly, and graciously accompanied her unwelcome guest to the door; but as it closed upon the tall, fur-wrapped figure, she turned and catching Althea in her arms sobbed as though her heart would break, whispering wildly, "Oh, dear Lord, never, never let her do it!"

"Mama, don't cry, please don't cry! What did that naughty lady say to you, 'cause I know she was cross. I could tell it by her mouf," half pleaded, half scolded poor Althea, frightened and sorry, and she couldn't tell why. And, for the first time none of her sweet little ways won a smile from Mrs. Alvoyd, who held her close in

her arms, caressing the lovely curls and dear little face passionately. When the twins, who had met at the gate, came in just before twilight, they were horrified to find their mother seated before the grate in the library with tearful eyes and trembling lips, while Althea cuddled up in her arms, was fast asleep.

"Mama, is Althea sick?" asked Lolly in alarm.

"No, daughter, but mother is very unhappy to-night, and I'm anxious for father to come; so if you'll carry her into her room, Lee, and you put her to bed, Lolly, I'll watch for him at the window."

"Mother, are you and father having some more trouble about money?" asked Lee, as he bent over to take Althea.

"No, dear," his mother answered. "I cannot explain it to you yet, and I only ask you to be very good to-night as father and I are going out. But do not mention the matter to papa until after tea," for even the great misery in her heart did not let her forget one of the wise, tender rules

that had helped so sweetly to govern her little household — never to tell unpleasant things before or at the table. "A comical story or merry joke, told during a dinner, has more to do with health than good digestion 'that must wait upon appetite,'" she often said, and very few clouds had ever darkened their dining hours. Though, of course, the first thing Dr. Alvoyd noticed upon his return was his wife's tear-stained face, but in some mysterious way she quieted his fears and tea was very pleasant. But when after tea their parents went into the parlor and closed the door, a strange sense of coming trouble oppressed the twins. It was almost an hour before they heard the door open and their father say cheerily, "It is seven now; by the time you're ready, dear, and we arrive it will be just about eight," and then their mother came up and said, smiling wearily:

"Don't worry, babes; father says the trouble is not nearly as bad as I thought and perhaps I will be able to tell you all about it to-morrow."

The next morning being Saturday, they had

planned a jolly time with Max, and when they came to breakfast the frolic was gaily spoken of, though neither of their parents took their usual part in the merriment and both looked grave and worried.

"Althea," said Mrs. Alvoyd, as they rose to leave the table, "Mammy Clar is going to make cookies and if you help her I think she will let you make some too."

"Doody, I'll make one for everybody," Althea cried joyfully.

"Why, if you make 'one for everybody' each of us could only have a tiny bite," teased Loo.

Althea looked at him in bewilderment for a moment, then said disapprovingly, "Looy, behave 'orself;" but Lee caught her hands and spun her around and around straight to the kitchen door and a parting twirl left her almost in Mammy's arms, where they heard her laugh merrily,

"I was tumming anyway, Mammy, but Lee wolled me in."

"Dat's right, honey-lub; Mammy's goin' to

make tuffies and we'll s'prise the rest of the family, sure 'nough."

"How, Mammy? Tell me quick," begged Althea joyfully.

"It's a secret, chile, can't be told——"

"Then whisper to me, Mammy, I won't tell," she pleaded earnestly.

Mammy Clar bent down and whispered mysteriously, "I'se gwine to make a whole family o' pickaninnies and you can put in their big white eyes!"

Althea danced and sang as she put away the salt and pepper-boxes and carried out the glasses, one at a time, to help Mammy "hurry." And while she prattled and frolicked down in the kitchen the twins were being told the "trouble" up in the library.

"Father, you won't let her take Althea away, will you?" despairingly cried Loo, as Dr. Alvoyd finished the story of Miss Wayne's claim.

"No, son, I will not," he answered, positively. "Althea is our child by every law and right, but

we must be fair, too, and as I shall not give her to her aunt I think it only just to let her have the pleasure of a friendly intercourse with her little niece. So it is best to tell Althea all about it, so she will know who Miss Wayne is, and perhaps in time grow to love her."

"Papa, it will break her heart to think she is not our baby," whispered Loll faintly, her lips white and quivering.

"Yes, dear, but Althea is really a baby and perhaps it is best after all, for the older she grows the harder it would be to tell her."

"Poor Miss Wayne is a lonely old woman, whose girlhood must have been full of bitter disappointments, and our beautiful darling may help to brighten her old age," said Mrs. Alvoyd pityingly, for the harsh woman had opened her heart a little the night before, and had pleaded hard for the possession of the little child, who had really won her heart.

"Oh, Mama," moaned Lona, kneeling beside her mother, "don't talk like that, for if you get

sorry for her, she might persuade you to give her Althea — please promise me you won't do that."

"If — if she takes Althea I'll steal her and run away," threatened Loo angrily, his eyes flashing.

Lee, who had listened very quietly, surprised his parents by saying earnestly, "And I'll help you, Loo."

"That will not be necessary, chicks. Althea will never leave us; but the matter on hand now is to tell her, and then make her forget her bewilderment and grief as soon as you can. I'm going to the College, and Mama is to tell her; so go about your Saturday duties as usual, and when Mother calls you do your best," Dr. Alvoyd said queitly, as he put on his coat. They all went to the door with him and after he had waved them a last good-bye at the corner turned to the hard task with heavy hearts.

"Now, boys, get your shovels and brooms and clean the yard path and sidewalk; Lona, see that your rooms are in perfect order for Mammy to

sweep," Mrs. Alvoyd said bravely, as the twins turned to her, with deep sighs.

"Yes, mother; but please call us as soon as you can," pleaded Loll.

"I will, daughter," and so they separated; the boys to work as though the ice and snow were "that hateful old beast!" as Loo wrathfully termed Miss Wayne, while the girls set the shoes in rows and covered the dressers and tables with neat dust cloths.

"Althea, Mama wants you, darling," Mrs. Alvoyd called, after a few moments of earnest prayer, begging God to "give her light to see, and grace to act."

"Oh, Mama, Mammy and me have dot the drandest swekert; I can't tell you but I'm going to make der white eyes," confided Althea, coming up the steps in a great hurry.

"I have a secret to tell you, too," began Mrs. Alvoyd rather weakly, as they walked into the sitting-room together.

"My! you'd sink it was Twismas, wouldn't

you?" laughed Althea, looking gaily into her mother's troubled face, as she climbed into her lap.

"That is just it, Althea, and you know that on Christmas Day the dear little Infant Jesus sent me Lee and Lona and Loo and Loll as the sweetest presents in the world, don't you pet?"

"Ess!"

"Well, Our Lord doesn't always send little babies like that, for sometimes he takes mamas up to Heaven and leaves little girls and boys for some other mama to love," she went on getting sadly mixed, as Althea looked at her with amazed eyes.

"Does He?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, and when you were a tiny little baby he sent you to a dear mama away up North, but she was so sweet and good that He wanted her in Heaven where your own papa was; so your Mama sent for me and said, 'Tudy, this is my precious little Althea. Won't you take her and love her and be good to her?' And I said, 'Yes.'

Then she kissed you, darling, and the next day we buried her out in the beautiful churchyard and Father and I took you way down to Rosemont where Lolly and Loo were," she went on rapidly, for Althea's lips were quivering, and she asked wofully, "But where is my little Mama now? Does she want me adain?"

"No, darling, she is with the angels; but she can see you, and loves you, even more than I do, and you must love her back again, for now you know she is there; and the lady who came here yesterday and asked you to go driving with her, is your own aunty, just like Aunty Maudechen, and you must be very fond of her, for she likes you and is very lonely."

At the news that the "cross lady" was her aunt and that she must be very good to her, Althea slipped her arms about Mrs. Alvoyd's neck and whispered pleadingly.

"She's so tross, Mama. Tan't I be your little dirl any more?" and her mother clasped her close and rocking gently back and forth soothed her

with the tenderest promises of love and protection.

So, for the second time, the danger of losing Althea brought her more closely into the lives of the Alvoyds, and she soon seemed to forget that she was "not really theirs;" though in obedience to her mother's wish she tried to overcome her fear of Miss Wayne, and for a long time asked strange, startling questions about "her little mama" whom she seemed to think was small like herself.

Miss Wayne coldly repulsed the offer of friendship with Althea and after seeing her three times informed Dr. Alvoyd that she was going back to California and never wished to hear of her niece again, and, fearing that he might think the child would be benefited by her death, she wished to inform him that she had made and signed her will, leaving her entire estate to the Pennsylvania Historical Society. But the cold, lonely old heart grieved and grieved for the beautiful, gentle child she had known little less than a week.

CHAPTER V.

NEW FRIENDS.

"LONA, I don't see why you like Tullia Perry so much," half complained Grace Bell one afternoon late in March, as she walked home from school with Lona.

"Why, Grace I think she's lovely," answered Lona, looking at her companion in surprise.

"I do too; but don't you know who she really is?" Grace asked a little hesitatingly.

"Who she is! What do you mean?" exclaimed Lona in bewilderment.

"She is not really Tullia Perry, but Tullia LeVee. She was adopted by Mr. Perry's wife when she was a little thing, from a Savannah Orphan Asylum. She doesn't even know who her own parents were, and that is why none of us girls are so very friendly, for Mrs. Perry died about two years ago and now they're rather

poor, and Tullia is going to teach school some day and, of course, that will always make a difference," Grace continued, hanging her flushed face, for Lona's scornful eyes were a little hard to meet just then.

"Why, Grace Bell! would you treat such a sweet girl unkindly just because she was poor and Our Lord had taken her mother and father and left you yours!" cried Lona, brave reproof in every word.

"Oh, it is really a question that was settled between us long ago; for when the girls first found it out they asked lots of things and once Iva Black sent her a note in school asking 'if she had ever seen this name' and there in big letters was 'Tullia LeVee.' Madam Roberta saw Iva pass the letter and tried to make Tullia give it to her, but she wouldn't—so Madam just seemed to let it pass; but in about an hour she sent Tullia on an errand to Reverend Mother, and when she was safely out of the room she made Iva tell her, right before us all, what was in the note, and

when she found out she grew as white as a sheet, but she got up and walked down to the first bench, and talked to us for about ten minutes in a way I'll never forget. Oh, it was terrible, and all of us were crying and, of course, after that we were all very kind to Tullia; but no one ever seemed to care about having her for a chum until you came; and I've heard the girls speak about your taking her, a number of times, so I just thought I'd tell you," finished Grace impressively.

"I'm very glad you did, and if she'll only have me, I'll be her chum *forever,*" declared Lona wârmly.

"You may do as you please; but I should think a Southern girl would understand how we feel about a person of no family," retorted the young aristocrat calmly.

"Yes, a Southern girl is taught to recognize a lady no matter where she finds her, and if Tullia Perry or LeVee or whoever she is, isn't one, I'll give up," declared Lona promptly.

"Well, then if that's your wish, please don't tell any one what I've said, for if Madam Roberta heard it, I'd be burnt at the stake," Grace replied coolly.

"Grace!" exclaimed Lona, horrified at such an idea.

"Not literally, deary, but figuratively, for I'd be 'roasted to death,' as the boys say."

"Well, I'll tell Mama, but no one else if you don't wish," Lona agreed readily, and bidding Grace good night, hurried home to find the whole family, with Max and his mother, in the parlor.

"Lona," announced Lee in a delighted shout after she had been greeted very lovingly by the dear friends, "Aunty Maudechen has invited us all to a theater party next Friday evening!"

"Oh, Max, what play will we see?" exclaimed Lona, as he came over and sat on the lounge beside her.

"'As You Like It,' with Miss Julia Marlowe as Rosalind."

"Oh! Oh! Oh! I am so glad, for only yester-

day Madam read Charles Lamb's story of that play — and then we have never really been to see a real drama in our lives," and Lona bounced up and down on the sofa in delight.

"Max, will there be anyone besides us?" asked Lee, as he and Loo joined the "couch party."

"Sure," replied Max, "one of my classmates, Clarence Fisher. Don't forget, Maudechen, you wanted to ask about someone for Clar to escort," he continued, smiling at her forgetfulness.

"Oh, yes," laughed Mrs. Melody, turning to Lona. "Isn't there some young friend you would care to take? Max wants to invite Clarence, and I thought you might wish to ask one of your school friends."

"My! I'd love to," Lona answered, her eyes dancing with pleasure.

"Whom would it be, dear?" asked her mother.

"Tullia Perry, Mama," Lona answered quickly.

"The young girl who has come here several times?" Mrs. Alvoyd questioned.

"Yes, Mama. She is so sweet and dear and

there is something I want to tell you about her, and then you'll want her to go also," Lona answered earnestly.

"Very well, dear, invite whom you please; send my card with your note and give me the little girl's address, so that the coach can stop for her before we come down here," Mrs. Melody said with a smile, as she rose to go.

That evening Lona told her mother about Tullia, and asked permission to be her chum. Mrs. Alvoyd looked into her little daughter's earnest eyes and asked quietly.

"How long have you known Tullia, deary?"

"Ever since the first day I went to school. Madam introduced her to us."

"And have you always found her kind and pleasant?"

"Mama, she is just lovely. She isn't gay like the rest of the girls, but she is so sweet and gentle and I like her much better than any of the others."

"Then, daughter, be just as friendly as you

wish; love her, and make her love you all you can; never ask her questions that might embarrass her, and if she gives you her confidence and tells you her little story repeat it to no one, not even me; for I know I can trust you, dear, to be brave enough to break the friendship if you ever find that you have been mistaken in Tullia. Can't I?"

"I reckon you can," answered Lona, lovingly laying her head against her mother's shoulder as she told all her thoughts and feelings of this first school-girl experience. But when the study hour was over the twins met a new affliction, for their mother came into the library laughing, and said with a gesture of comical dismay.

"Babes, now we are in a fix! You have accepted this invitation, but what in the world are you little girls going to wear?"

"Going to wear?" echoed Lolly in surprise.

"Why, Mama, our pretty white dresses that we wore to Ethel Ray's birthday party," answered Lona promptly.

"Oh, no, daughter, those simple mulls won't do for a theater party."

"My gracious, what will we do then!" cried Lona in alarm.

"That's what I've been thinking and thinking," replied her mother with a little frown of perplexity.

"Oh, Mama, just buy some blue ribbon for our hair and waist and sleeves, and our white dresses will do well enough," ventured Lolly, for dress problems were never very weighty to her.

"No, that wouldn't do, either, but it gives me an idea; I have the pale blue satin frock I wore to Mrs. Archer's silver wedding. It will make dear little slips for you both, and you can wear your white mull dresses over them, looped up with ribbons. Thank goodness, boys, father insisted upon giving you each a dress suit last Christmas, instead of silver watches, as I wished; but please don't grow very fast — for if you do, you can't go to the theater," she threatened laughingly.

And after much contriving, seven o'clock

Friday evening found the twins in gala dress waiting primly in the parlor. Lee proudly lent dignity to the quartet, for his first evening suit had the greatly desired long trousers; Loo looked for all the world like a chubby gentleman doll, while the girls in their homemade party dresses with baby lace berthas were beautiful, though no one knew it but their parents.

As Loo followed Lolly into the opera-coach, he laughed softly, "This reminds me of the straw-ride," but she hadn't time to answer before she was gently pulled down next to Max, while Lona made her way to Tullia, shyly peeping from a fleecy pink nubia. The ride was very rapid and hardly were the introductions among the boys and girls over, before the theater was reached, and here a new surprise awaited them; instead of going into the parquet, Max led the way to the stage-box on the right, and a white-haired gentleman in the balcony whispered to his wife,

"Bessie, that's the handsomest party of young people I've seen since our day. That brown-

haired child in blue and white looks like one of B——'s creations."

"Yes, the maiden in 'Where the Brook and River Meet,'" answered the gentle old lady, watching with dimmed eyes the lovely picture of fair youth in the rich framing of the opera-box.

The twins, so unfamiliar with stagecraft, were simply dazzled when the curtain rose and disclosed the beautiful orchard near Oliver's house; and they unconsciously leaned forward, as though with eyes as well as ears to grasp every word and movement when young Orlando, with sad, yet indignant voice, came slowly forward and so bitterly complained to old Adam of his unkempt, untutored state, in the house of his eldest brother. Lolly's sweet lips were drooping as the pale youth finished despairingly,—"I will no longer endure it!" and she remained very sober during the rest of the scene, in which Oliver, the brother, all unsuspected, cruelly planned, through Charles the court wrestler, to kill the lad, and goes off the stage with the

villainous intention of "exciting the boy" to a combat with the professional.

"Max, please tell me the very moment Rosalind comes on the stage," whispered Lona, as the theater darkened for the change to the second scene.

"The next will be a garden before the usurping Duke's palace, and Rosalind and Celia, her cousin, will come in together," Max answered, and then went on very softly: "Rosa is always pictured as a brown-haired lassie, beautiful and brave; while Celia is shown as fair and timid as a child, strong only in her love for Rosalind and justice. Lona, you'll find that Shakespeare's characters always balance, in comparisons that are felt rather than seen. Here they are!" he whispered, as to a sprightly air and a blaze of lights two young girls, gowned in sixteenth century costumes, appeared in the garden of the picturesque French palace.

The words of their girlish raillery were so merrily read that the young faces in the box were

soon wreathed in smiles; but at the entrance of Duke Frederick, his cruel sentence of banishment to Rosalind, and her heartbroken, though brave plea to "know her fault" brought all the little girls very near to tears; and Lona whispered to Lee, as Celia ended her loving championing of her cousin's cause, "I'll love her forever! Isn't she the dear." And when Celia, with her gentle arms about her weeping cousin, pleaded to be taken "Along with thee," and winning the reluctant consent cried happily,

> Now go we in content
> To liberty and not to banishment,

Lolly, with a ringing laugh, clapped her hands loudly.

It was a magnificent performance all through; but I think a student of Froebel, the master of child hearts, would have found greater richness in that box near the stage than in either the exalted lines, or famous rendition of characters; for every emotion depicted on the stage was reflected in the eager faces that watched in en-

tranced silence the unfolding of the beautiful story, from palace to forest and back again.

When the twins returned, Lolly crept into her father's arms, and with blissful sighs and exclamations of sleepy rapture regaled herself with crackers and milk; while the others pranced about, talking excitedly, with every adjective in the dictionary.

"Here it's twelve o'clock! To bed with you!" exclaimed Dr. Alvoyd, after the lunch, and a few moments of merrymaking: "Kindly act upon one of your friend Billy's commands,

> Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But go at once!"

"All right, good night!"

"Oh, it was just grand!"

"Good night!"

CHAPTER VI.

"THE SHAKES."

THE evening after the theater party, Max and Tullia came in to talk over the joys of the night before, and found the Alvoyds, from doctor to Althea, gathered about the sitting-room fire doing so already.

"Oh, Lona, it seems like a dream to me," sighed Tullia, whose bright mind had reveled in every moment of the Shakespearian grandeur.

"Max, are all plays as beautiful as 'As you Like It'?" asked Lona wonderingly, in answer to Tullia's sigh.

"I never saw a finer production of any piece than the one last night," Max answered, for he had been honestly delighted with the success of his mother's entertainment. "And I've been thinking that we ought to organize some kind of

a literary society or club, to meet occasionally for study and fun. I belong to a half dozen at college; but one for just us few would be jolly. What do you think, Dr. Alvoyd?"

The doctor, who had commenced reading something in a low tone to his wife, stopped and looked up just as Max asked his opinion and replied heartily,

"It's a splendid idea; and as you are all so interested in Shakespeare, I think a club for the purpose of studying him would be about right. You have special reason to be interested in one of his dramas right now, and while you are all too young to study his works line by line, as is done in later college courses, study and thought of one play at a time would be a very pleasant winter pastime, broaden your knowledge of almost every phase of human character, improve your command of English, and open up to each of you a whole world of new thoughts."

"Let's do it! Appoint officers, keep a minute-book and learn everything!" exclaimed Lee, who,

when he was enthusiastic, was so all over. He was as willing to learn everything now, as he had been to show Max "everything" in Jacksonville, when he wanted to go on the never-to-be-forgotten trip.

"Begin by learning one thing at a time, son, but learn it well," laughed his mother, more interested in keeping her young people happy at home than she ever dreamed of being in safe Rosemont.

"What'll be the first thing to do?" asked Lona, always anxious for action.

"Find out who you will have for members," answered her mother quickly, for she also watched with tender anxiety the broadening of her little family's outside interests and entered heartily into all their plans and friendships, and soon found that a plate of apples or cookies sent into the children's den made such a sweet impression, that stormy Saturdays or Sundays always found a merry assemblage in the "Roost," a small room in the attic, through which ran the

big furnace chimney, which conveniently supplied the necessary warmth.

In answer to her suggestion, Lee began to count over the boys and girls they knew.

"Max, Tullia, we four—and—and——"

"Oh, do have Gabriella," begged Lolly, whose devotion to that wild child was a never-ending astonishment to the family.

"Why, Loll, that kid wouldn't take any more interest in Orlando than you do in frogs!" answered Loo impatiently, though honest conviction rang in every word.

"Yes, she would, Looy. She just loves Buffalo Bill, and——"

But the rest of her earnest recommendation was lost in the gale of laughter that met the doubtful praise of her queer friend.

Tullia saw the disappointment on Lolly's face and championed her cause warmly.

"Really, she said, "we ought to have her, for Madam Roberta says that Gay is the brightest little girl she has ever known. You see, she is

the only sister among seven brothers, and they spoil her first by petting, and then by teaching her their own mischief, and they are a lively set I tell you."

"Gabriella Casmyo maketh the mystic seventh in the—say, what shall we call the Club?" asked Max merrily, stopping in the midst of his verbal rite to settle the important question then and there.

"Just the Shakespeare Club," suggested Lona aptly, "for he was fine and great."

"The many-souled Willie," laughed her father as he bade them good night, on his way to an evening clinic.

"Now, my beloved 'Shakes,'" observed Max roguishly, "for we are none of us bright or sharp enough to be 'Spears', we will begin this organization properly. Meet, without fail, every other Saturday evening. The first duty of each member shall be to read Charles Lamb's story of whatever play has been decided upon, and in that way learn the plot and characters of the piece in question."

"As we already know the story of 'As You Like It' suppose we begin with it?" suggested Tullia, to whom the play was an absorbing topic just now.

"Good!" declared the others in a breath.

"Then what?" asked Loll.

"Let's see," and Max shook his head thoughtfully.

"I have it! Each of us learn as many lines of the play as we wish, not less than ten, though; memorize and recite them at the meetings," cried Lee.

"Then tell why we chose them particularly, and what we think of the character who says 'em," added Lona.

"And if anybody can think of something nice to work in, why go ahead; any novelty will be acceptable as long as we keep wholly to the subject," said Max, after many ideas and plans had been discussed and they were parting for the night.

On the Saturday appointed for the first meet-

ing, the girls spent the afternoon putting the "Roost" in order; a kitchen table served as a desk and six chairs in all stages of crippled old age were in place before it; while the seventh, because it had an official looking back and stood upon three legs, and a box was placed back of it. Max had donated his two travelers' lanterns and Gay hung them on the rafters, high enough to be out of danger of accident; but the whole outfit was finally moved as close to the warm chimney as possible, for the night was cold and stormy and they enjoyed the feeling of cosy shelter as they gathered in the warm corner and listened in silence for a few moments to the roaring wind. Promptly at 7:15 Max brought the meeting to order and called upon Lee for the first number of the program. Lee arose and walking back into the shadows told the story of "As You Like It."

"Once upon a time, in a fair province of France, Duke Frederick, a young nobleman, usurped the throne of his elder brother, whom he banished from the Court. The exiled duke re-

tired to a famous forest, Arden, and here, in company with a few faithful friends and followers, spent the time in careless ease and freedom, thoroughly enjoying the pure delights of rural life after having suffered so much from the deceptions found at Court.

"But while the banished duke and his followers were living thus in peaceful enjoyment, his brother, Frederick, and the dishonest head of another house, Oliver, were making three young hearts, left in their care, sad with misery. Like all wicked people, the usurper found much to condemn in his unfortunate brother's sweet daughter Rosalind, and suddenly, under great anger, ordered her to follow her father into exile; but, unconsciously, he condemned his own child Celia to the same fate, for her sympathies were all with her unhappy cousin, and when Rosalind obeyed her uncle's commands and left the palace that night, fair little Celia went with her. Before they set out, for greater safety in travel as well as for a disguise, Rosalind dressed as a shepherd-

boy and took the name of Ganymede; while, habited like a country lass, Celia traveled under the name of Aliena—in reference to her state—an alien.

"After a long journey they reached the forest of Arden, and with one of Celia's jewels bought a shepherd's cottage; and the cousins lived there for many weeks, as brother and sister.

"Now Duke Frederick's countryman, Oliver, had a young brother, Orlando, whom he hated and wished to be rid of; so after trying to murder him, by a wickedly planned wrestling match between the lad and Charles, the court wrestler, and failing in that, for it only had the effect of making Rosalind, who had witnessed the contest, fall in love with victorious Orlando and thereby win for him the friendship of Celia; and after the one plan failed he made other preparations to kill his brother, but they were discovered by a faithful old servant, Adam. The latter prevailed upon the unfortunate boy to fly from the Court and take refuge with the banished duke in the

forest. This Orlando did, and arrived in the woodlands shortly after Rosalind and Celia had taken up their shepherd life there. But having reached it by another route he and old Adam, whom he had taken with him, shortly met the duke and promptly became members of his company.

"This, of course, left the young hero plenty of time to think of Rosalind, and he went moping about carving her name on trees and writing pretty verses to her, which he left carelessly on bush and tree. These, of course, Rosalind and Celia promptly found, and one day met the rustic poet himself; and, while they knew very well who he was, he did not recognize them in their countrified clothes; and Rosalind, by complaining of the lover who was marking up all the pretty trees with the name 'Rosalind,' led him to tell her that he was Cupid's unhappy victim; and she very soon had the whole story of his love. As a jest, she mischievously promised to cure him of the complaint on the condition that he

come every day and woo her as though she were indeed his lady-love; which, of course, he agreed to do, as it made him happy to talk of Rosalind even with a country boy. As he was coming through the forest to her cottage one morning, he discovered a lion about to kill his wicked brother, Oliver; and out of the kindness of his heart slew the beast, gladly returning good for evil; which act so overcame his brother that he asked forgiveness on the spot, and, when he found that Orlando's arm had been injured by the beast, he took him to rest under the trees while he went on to the cottage for assistance. He not only obtained it, but promptly fell in love with the little shepherdess, Celia; and after an ardent courtship of two days obtained her consent to an immediate marriage; for her brother, Ganymede, readily gave his consent, and also promised that if Orlando really loved Rosalind as much as he said he did, and truly wished to marry her, he, through magic, would grant him his desire.

"Orlando assured her very earnestly of his

longings in that direction, and she went off, apparently to begin the rites that were to help her fulfil her promise.

"Now Oliver had gaily invited the duke and his followers to his wedding, and in the morning when they had all assembled for the feast Rosalind and Celia, still in their disguises as shepherd boy and girl, appeared; and, after getting a general consent from the duke for the marriage of his daughter to Orlando, suddenly retired and came back in a few moments in their own court clothes. Rosalind soon told the whole story and two happy little brides were wedded under the trees of aged Arden. And a beautiful gift came to them all unexpected, for at the end of the feast a messenger arrived and announced that Duke Frederick had repented of his wickedness, and had restored to his brother the dukedom. So they all returned from banishment, the faithful friends were rewarded, and they lived happily ever after."

Adam to Orlando:

"I have five hundred crowns,
The thrifty hire I sav'd under your father
Which I did store, to be my foster nurse
When service should in my old limbs lie lame,
And unregarded age in corners thrown:
Take that; and He that doth the ravens feed,
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,
Be comfort to my age! Here is the gold;
All this I give you."

Lee was heartily applauded, for he surprised them by the simple clearness with which he had outlined the plot, and the unconscious power he used in reciting old Adam's loyal offer of his frugal savings to his young master's need.

After a few moments' frolic, "that was out of order" and for that reason alone very merry, Max announced gaily,

"Tullia Perry, next!"

Tullia rose and began shyly:

"I re-read the story, according to the rules, and wrote a short parallel of the characters of Rosalind and Celia; for the friendship of the princess for her homeless cousin seems to me the most beautiful keynote in the play.

ROSALIND AND CELIA.

"Celia is a princess, Rosalind a dependent; by birth they are cousins, through misfortune — friends. The one a fair, timid child, grieved by the wrongs of her father's committing; the other a daring, bonny lassie, grieved by the injustices to her father; the love of Celia is one of pity, that of Rosalind is gratitude; two young girls, one in and one "out of suits with fortune;" Celia to be loved for her faithfulness, Rosalind for her tenderness.

"Celia to Rosalind:

> . . . . . Call me
> Something that hath a reference to my state;
> No longer Celia, but Aliena.
>
> *Rosalind*:
>
> But cousin, what if we essay'd to steal
> The clownish Fool out of your father's court?
> Would he not be a comfort to our travels?
>
> *Celia*:
>
> He'll go along o'er the wide world with me;
> Leave me alone to woo him: Let's away
> And get our jewels and our wealth together,
> Devise the fittest time and safest way

To hide us from pursuit that will be made
After my flight: Now go we in content
To liberty and not to banishment.'"

Tullia ended the lines in such a sweet, sad way, that it was a moment before she received her applause, and then it was longer though not so noisy as Lee's had been.

"Looly Loo's!" summoned Max.

"Lolly read the story to me twice, so I know she knows it," was Loo's comment on the first ruling. "And I took Touchstone for my man, when he said, 'I care not for my spirits, if my legs were not so weary!'" and he went on waggishly: "I do now remember a saying, 'The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.' The heathen philosopher, when he had a desire to eat a grape, would open his lips when he put it into his mouth; meaning thereby that grapes were made to eat and lips to open."

They laughed heartily, as Loo danced about in true Touchstone's style, imitating the plucking and eating of grapes.

"Loo, you were born to be a clown," laughed Lee.

"And I'll bet I turn out a wise man!" returned Loo with a grin.

"Lolly!" called Max, as he saw her move toward the door, for it was her turn next and he feared she didn't want to recite before them all; but he was mistaken, for she answered him with a smile, and came back carrying Gay's guitar.

"Here, this isn't a dance," laughed Lona.

"I know it. But Gay and I read the story again and again, and we both wanted to learn the same lines, so we settled it this way;" and before the others realized what they were about, Gay played a few rippling chords and to a sweet, wild air the two little girls sang the lovely song of the banished duke's cousin, Amiens:

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
  As man's ingratitude;
Thy tooth is not so keen,
Because thou art not seen,
  Although thy breath be rude.

Heigh-ho! sing, heigh-ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, heigh-ho! the holly!
This life is most jolly."

"Jimminy! that's fine!" cried Loo.

"Well, you two kids surely do get the prize," laughed Max.

"How did you ever do it?" asked Lona and Tullia, in a breath.

"Madam Rosina helped me with the music, and she said it would make a nice variation to the program. She thinks this is a fine plan. And as there were ten lines in the verse, that gave us each our share, and we hope we took advantage of it!" exclaimed Gay and Loll roguishly, while the others laughed heartily at the connivance of the youngsters.

"Look here, Mr. Max," laughed Gay, "you come next."

"The story I have known for a long time, but I read it just the same, and chose the lines that are the most frequently quoted, because I knew

them," Max remarked complacently, as he took his place.

"'Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life exempt from public haunt
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything!'"

As he ended, a sunny head appeared at the door, and Mrs. Alvoyd came in armed with a plate of apples and cakes.

"Now finish these up in a jiffy and then off with you, or instead of 'Shakes' you'll all be shaken. It is nine o'clock and by the time you boys take Tullia and Gay home it will be quite late."

"No, it won't, Aunt Tude; for the carriage is coming for me, and I'll see the girls home in just about ten minutes," Max said simply.

Mrs. Alvoyd smiled her gratitude for his thoughfulness and asked as she smuggled into the chimney corner near Loll and Gay,

"Was the first meeting a success, and did

everyone keep the rules?" she said with a mischievous look at Loo.

"Mama, it was fine!" declared Lee; "now we all know the story, the characters, and a lot of the lines. It is just like meeting twenty-one strange people and getting to know them right well in one evening."

"Yes, some you like and others you can almost hate. The very first time I meet a person I either like them greatly or dislike them 'muchly' as old Ann says; and that's just the way I felt when Duke Frederick came on the stage the other night, and the more I saw of him the less I liked him."

"But he repented very much in the end," Lolly remarked, always ready to shield the "under man."

"Ho! after he had made about two dozen people miserable for months," commented Gay disgustedly.

"Well, if he hadn't it would have spoilt the story," Max laughed as he opened the minute-

book. "We will now proceed with the program for the next meeting which will take place two weeks from to-night."

"Mr. President, may I make a suggestion?" asked Tullia.

"Sure," laughed Lee.

"Here, you're out of order!" reproved Max with a mighty pound of the tackhammer, that had been pressed into service as a gavel.

"I'll help you clean house to-morrow, Lee, and see that you get back into order," whispered Lona, glad of a chance to teach her precise twin.

"Beloved Shakes, during this insurrection the suggestion may escape, so kindly declare a truce and permit me to pass upon this spy, in the shape of an idea, that has been captured in our ranks. Tullia Perry, bring forth the villain."

"As I was making a mental comment upon the good delivery of the lines to-night, a shadowy form passed before my ken, and upon making an onslaught I captured a 'fancy' for an innovation at our next meeting. Let's divide some of the

dialogues of the first act between us, taking the shorter ones, and then make a little play of it."

"That would be jolly!" chorused the Shakes.

"Let's do it with each act until we have learned the whole play and then have a regular show — with costumes and scenery," said Lona, waving her handkerchief to express her approval of her own plan. Which must have been very acceptable for the Club seconded the motion heartily, and early in the spring the "show" *was* given, after much work and study and was a great success, with Lona as Rosalind and Tullia as Celia; Lee took the parts of both the good and bad brother, Duke Frederick and his banished elder brother; Max was Orlando; Lolly was Phebe, and Gay was Audrey; Loo took the parts of Touchstone and Jaques. They turned one-half of the attic into a stage, wore homemade gowns, and four members of Max's Glee Club acted as orchestra. Althea represented Hymen, and though she only spoke *once* during the entire performance her little speech at the end of the play produced

tumultuous applause from the thirty boys and girls who made up the audience; for dressed in a nighty of pink cambric, draped with two fur collarettes and a wreath of laurel leaves on her head, she seemed a perfect representation of the jolly god of wedding feasts as she solemnly joined the hands of the different couples with the pretty words,

> "A wedding is great Juno's crown:
> Honor, high honor and renown,
> To Hymen, god of every town!"

CHAPTER VII.

LOO.

"SAY, Alvoyd, what's on your card for this afternoon?" asked one of Loo's classmates, as they met in the Institute courtyard, one warm sunshiny midday in April.

"An hour of history and one of physiology," Loo answered with a frown of weariness, for his head ached and he was warm and tired.

"Say, three of us fellows are going out to Fairmount Park for a lark, and Dawson told me to get you, if you'd come. We're going out on the street car and will get home about five o'clock. Will you come?"

"Sure; what time do you start and where shall we meet?" asked Loo, always ready for fun.

"We're going right now. The boys are over on Market street waiting for us."

"Why, how can you go *now?* Don't you fellows have classes in the afternoon?" Loo asked in a tone of bewilderment.

"Say, what are you — an infant?" laughed Ted in a whisper. "Haven't you ever heard of playing hooky?"

"Oh, is that what you mean?" Loo asked with a grin.

"Are you coming?" Ted asked carelessly, as he turned toward the gate.

Loo looked after him for a moment and then glanced into the library where he was due right then for a half-hour's reading in the non-circulating department.

"Infant!" came in a laughing whisper from the gateway, and in another second two boys were racing down the school-walk, and Loo thereby opened the way to much trouble and real pain for himself and others. He did have a glorious time though, as far as the sport itself was concerned; but deep down in his heart a small voice was whispering, "You're a sneak.

Father is working day and night to give you a good education, and you're throwing it away."

"I'll just wager dad run away from school many a time himself," Loo answered to his conscience, and went on enjoying the fishing with pins, and wading through rocky pools of W—— Creek, and building fires, pretending that they were the Lewis and Clark expedition on the famous march across the Louisiana Territory, from St. Louis to Portland.

"Fellows, it's five o'clock," Ted said, as the last flame died down, and twilight's stillness settled over the woods.

"Jupiter, it will take an hour to get home!" exclaimed Loo, a sudden fear of the consequences coming over him.

"What if it does! Are you going back and tell that you 'legged' like a good little boy?" teased Albert Love, a lad whose existence was one mischievous lark, but whose mother, whom he ruled by reason of his winning ways and merry nature, thought him perfection.

"I don't know if I will or not," Loo answered, with a grand air of "I do as I please."

But he *was* late, and to his mother's anxious question, "Why, Loo, where have you been?" he answered carelessly, "Playing with the rest of the fellows!"

"That's the truth," whispered the little voice, and if Dr. Alvoyd's hurried entrance had not taken his mother's mind from him her next question might have brought out the whole truth — for Loo would not tell a deliberate lie, and they might all have been spared many anxious hours; for that afternoon's prank was only the beginning, and many pleasant spring days found Loo off to the woods, with the three mischievous lads who were now his boon companions. Ted's older brother discovered it first and told Max.

Had it been Lee who was in mischief Max would not have been so surprised, for he knew how hard the boy had been working all winter, and *he* might play truant to ease up his eyes.

"But that scapegrace Loo!" Max exclaimed to

himself. "Just you wait until I see him — a Dutch uncle's scolding will be a grandma to what I'll say." And the next noon Loo was surprised to see him come into the Institute lunchroom; but he hailed him joyfully and made a place for him at the table where he and his set were making merry.

"See here, old man," Max said, as they walked toward the door, "where were you yesterday afternoon? Lee and I went out to Fisher's and hunted for you everywhere."

Loo looked frightened for a moment, and then replied somewhat testily:

"If Lee had told me you were going at noon, I'd have gone too."

"Why should we give you notice ahead of time, when we were only going after school?" Max asked quickly.

"Well, because——" Loo began reddening.

"Where were you yesterday?" demanded Max sharply, stopping still and looking at his companion sternly.

"None of your business," retorted Loo, looking as angry as a thunder-cloud, though he was really frightened to death.

"Confound it, it is my business!" returned Max, his eyes kindling, "and I know where you were — you played truant with Ted White, and if you do it again I'll — I'll ——"

"Tell father, I suppose," interrupted Loo angrily. "Go ahead and peach all you want and find out how much I care!"

"Thank you. I don't tell tales," returned Max loftily, but he went on earnestly, for he suddenly remembered how impossible it was to influence Loo in any way except kindly: "Look here, Loo: it is quite different with Ted White and Alfred St. Claire; they're rich and can have private tutors to help them over examination time, when otherwise they would fail because of the work they shirked during school. But you ought to remember that every moment lost in this course of yours is time and money wasted."

Now this is just what Loo had been thinking

all along, and he had just resolved to go back to work, and wait for his fun until vacation; but to be told it was what he ought to do, and must do, decided him immediately to have at least one more lark and show that he wasn't a sissy to be ordered about and preached to. But that "one lark" cost Loo very dear, and often in cruel pain he whispered to Max,

"How can you be so kind to me when it is all my own fault — and I was such a minge?" though now he replied gruffly, as he marched off with an air of injured dignity,

"Well, next time I want to have some fun I'll come and ask you."

"The blessed young rascal!" almost laughed Max, loking after him with twinkling eyes. "I've a good notion to race after him and give him a good punch. Of all the high and mighty airs of deep-dyed villainy that fourteen-year-old kid takes the noodle. I won't tell on him yet, but I'll go down to-night and propose that tramping trip out to Valley Forge for Friday afternoon and

Saturday, he'll make up then and be friends again," and Max hurried back to college, little dreaming that his well-meant efforts only hastened a deep trouble to the dear friends down in the little park house.

"Alvoyd, look here," greeted Ted with a grin of mischief a little while later, as he spied Loo soberly coming up the Institute steps; "we've got the plan of our lives for this afternoon. We all have to attend the first hour; we have skipped so much this week that old Pokes will be down on us head and toes if we won't; but after that we're going out to Overbrook to Alfred's aunt Etta — she's a daisy and we can have a circus out there. Are you with us?"

"Surely," but Loo was very glad he could have the first class without seeming to want it, especially when he met Lee as they filed out to the study hall an hour later. And then the four scamps left the ranks at different times but met on the way over to Market street, and boarded a car for Overdale. Loo found Alfred's aunt a merry

girl of twenty, who frolicked with them all over the lovely place; through blossom-laden orchards that reminded him of Rosemont; on an egg hunt in the great barns, and finally sent them home after a jolly lunch in the garden, for a sudden darkening of the sun and low roll of thunder gave warning of a coming spring storm; and the boys just reached the cars before the rain came down in torrents.

Finding themselves the only passengers aboard, Alfred and Loo raced up to the very front seat, while Ted and Carol stayed on the back platform to talk to the conductor.

No one ever knew just how it happened, — there was a violent shock and the car crashed over on its side.

Max went down to the Alvoyd's after tea, and found them in a state of great excitement, for Loo had not come home from school at all, and his mother was frantic with uneasiness. He was just telling her that he knew Loo was somewhere with Ted White, and most likely storm-bound

some place, when the bell rang, and while the whole family followed him, Dr. Alvoyd went quickly forward and opened it to — Alfred St. Claire and his father!

"My dear sir," said the gentleman gravely, "the time for the blame of this mishap will come later; but your son Lucillian was slightly injured in a street-car accident, near my brother's home in Overdale — he——"

"Oh, where is he now?" cried Mrs. Alvoyd, coming forward with such a white face that Mr. St. Claire took both her shaking hands in his as he answered kindly,

"At St. Anthony's Hospital, but they telephoned me just before I left that he was not really injured, only somewhat bruised. My carriage is here and I beg of you to use it, for it seems that my son was the ring-leader in all this mischief, as he usually is." And as Dr. and Mrs. Alvoyd, with Alfred and his father, whirled through the dim streets a few moments later, the whole surprising story of how the lads had played

truant day after day was told by Alfred in a trembling, wretched voice.

They were treated with kindly haste at the hospital when they came in after the long ride, but poor Mrs. Alvoyd clung frantically to her husband as they made their way down a long, dim aisle of small white beds to where two nurses and a physician were leaning over a young boy whose blood-stained bandages did not deceive his mother, and with a low sob of misery Mrs. Alvoyd sank on her knees beside Loo and passionately kissed the damp, cold hands that lay limp on the coverlet.

At the slight touch the lad opened his eyes and smiled wearily, then fell back into a fitful sleep, from which he roused again and again during that long night only to moan in pain and distress.

"Has he been badly injured?" Dr. Alvoyd asked anxiously of the young attendant who was binding one of Loo's arms.

"He received slight cuts and bruises all over the body, and I'm afraid there is some injury to

the spine, for even under the opiate any movement seems to pain him," the young physician answered soberly.

"Couldn't we have him moved into a private room?" asked Mrs. Alvoyd nervously, for from where she was kneeling she could see many other restless little heads on pillows of pain.

"Not now," the surgeon answered quickly; "the suffering would be too great; and I have given him a narcotic and want him to sleep as long as possible."

So while their mother kept a sorrowful watch beside their wayward brother, their father hastened home to relieve the minds of the twins; and when he arrived the scene that met his eyes reminded him of the night, so long ago, when Althea had been lost; for the children, with Max, were watching for him from the window.

"Oh, father!" was all Lolly could whisper, as she crept into his arms.

"It's all right, daughter. Loo was only scratched and bruised a bit, but he is doing very

nicely, and I hope has had some of the mischief shaken out of him," he laughed; though he finished soberly with the story of Loo's wrong-doing and punishment.

"Why didn't you bring him home?" Loll asked tremulously, for to hear her dear twin censured was a great grief to her, and she longed to tell him right then how much *she* loved him, no matter how bad he had been.

"We thought it best to leave him where he is for to-night; it is storming so," her father answered gently, wishing to shield her from the pain he knew the truth would bring; though he understood the reason for her question, and in her faithfulness to faulty Loo he saw their greatest hope of guiding the spirited boy into righteous manhood. "Now," he went on cheerfully, "I want all of you to pack off to bed and go straight to sleep; we've had enough excitement for one day, without any evening entertainments," and they all obeyed him, even Max, who had sent his mother word of the trouble, and

that he wished to stay all night, in case he should be needed.

Early the next morning Dr. Alvoyd was back at the hospital and had just spoken to the doctor and nurse when Loo's dark eyes slowly opened and gazed about at the strange surroundings in bewilderment, until suddenly they saw the loving face, and then he remembered, and whispered with a penitent sob, as he stretched out his bandaged arms to his mother,

"Oh, Mama, Mama, stay with me! I know I've been bad, but the pain is so terrible—and—I'm afraid—of—father——"

"Afraid of father, sonny!" echoed Dr. Alvoyd reproachfully, as he stooped over to kiss the trembling lips.

"You can thrash me for a year, dad, if—you'll *only* say you don't think I'm a sneak!" the boy whispered.

Dr. Alvoyd took the lad's hand and replied soothingly,

"What you did, Loo, was not exactly 'sneaky,'

for you went openly, and were bound to be discovered; but it was very, very wrong, as I'm afraid you know now. And it would have been braver and better to tell the fault and take the punishment rather than go on and on, and come to such grief as this—for you have made us all suffer greatly."

"Oh, I'm so sorry—and every time I do the least thing wrong I get paid back a hundred times worse. First I lost Althea—and now this!" wailed Loo childishly.

"Each human sin receives its punishment sooner or later, son; and I'm afraid you got yours sooner this time," his father answered with a smile.

But poor Loo's punishment was not over soon, and for three long weeks he lay on a bed of pain and weariness; but when the ache in his back was not too bad he chatted with a newsboy in the cot next to his, who was stoically mourning the loss of a foot: and *his* many queer remarks and views upon the world in general were a source of great

amusement to our boy when his heart was heavy with remorse.

"Golly Gosh! Who's the kid?" newsy asked solemnly after Lolly's first visit to her brother; for the urchin's round blue eyes had grown larger and larger at the spectacle of the tenderness and love the pretty child showered upon his cot-mate; and had simply stared at her when she brought him an orange and some cool white grapes, and though he ate them slowly as she had smilingly advised, gazed at the two, so evidently happy at being together, as a wild man might have done."

"She is my twin," Loo answered proudly, for the accident had made him very humble, and he was grateful for all the love and kindness the family were trying to show him, the culprit.

"Hu! She's a peach! It's no wonder you're a pair!" newsy observed waggishly, as the last slice of orange disappeared; and from that time on the little girl's visit became a source of amazement and delight to the rough boy, who never spoke one word to her, but accepted her many

little acts of kindness with a fixed stare of something between admiration and mirth.

"Father, why can't I go home?" Loo asked meekly one evening, when his father came in to see him alone; for Loo had begun to think that they were leaving him at the hospital as a punishment.

"The doctors think it would hurt you too much to be moved," his father answered quietly.

"Dad, am I hurt much?" the boy asked slowly, a note of great fear in his voice.

"I'm afraid you are, my son. Not——"

"Will I be crippled?" interrupted Loo in terror.

"No, thank God! But you will have to stay in bed for a long time, and then use crutches for a while. Now, for mama's sake be brave, my boy, and we will help you all we can," his father whispered comfortingly, as the curly head went deep in the pillows, and Loo sobbed despairingly,

"Oh, Father, Father, how can I bear it — to give up school—and everything!"

"Poor little man!" Dr. Alvoyd said compassionately, and then waited with the patience of a woman until Loo had sobbed the first fear and bitter grief away; and then he talked to him so quietly and cheerfully that when he kissed him good night an hour later the lad whispered brokenly,

"Oh, daddy, I'll try—to be—good—and—brave!"

And in the painful weeks that followed, first at the hospital, and then at home, fiery Loo was both; and with a boy's sense of justice he tried to add the harder virtue of patience.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEE.

By the time Loo was able to hobble about on crutches vacation came, and with it an unexpected change in family affairs. The day after commencement Lee electrified the household by walking in to tea with the announcement,

"Say people, I've got a place!"

"A place?" echoed Lona.

"What do you mean, Lee?" asked his mother, with a smile—and a sigh; for poor Mrs. Alvoyd was beginning to feel that with city life had come all sorts of strange ideas to possess her children and awaited each new freak with a smile and low sigh.

"Why, a place to work, Mama," answered the boy with an anxious look at his father, as he went on hurriedly, "Professor Baker told me

about a month ago that I could get a position in an architect's office if I wished to; and when I said I did, he gave me a note to a friend of his in the Betz Building; so last Saturday I went down to see him and after he examined my drawings he said he'd give me four dollars a week to make tracings, as my work showed great accuracy and that is what he needed in architectural plans," and Lee sat down with a proud smile, as he asked earnestly, "I can take it, can't I, father?"

"I've no objections," Dr. Alvoyd said heartily, for he was greatly pleased at Lee's spirit of independence and willingness to work.

"But, deary, you have studied so hard all the year; I wish you could enjoy a little of your vacation," his mother said gently, though willing to let permission for any such innovation come from her husband.

"I wish so, too, but I think it will be fine to go down to business every day, and have just one hour at noon," Lee replied in a happy voice,

for he found pleasure in every change that brought him in contact with some new form of life.

So he was down at the office a half-hour ahead of time on the following Monday morning and came home at six o'clock very tired; but told with a beaming face of that never-to-be-forgotten first day's work.

"Oh, Dad, I was so ashamed this morning," he confided anxiously. "Mr. Woods told me to go down to the Fourth National Bank and deliver a letter, and, of course, I asked him where it was; and he looked at me so queerly and said gruffly, 'Say, where did you come from?' just like he thought it must have been 'Willow Creek.' So I told him I was from Florida and didn't know the places downtown very well, but that I would soon; and I guess I got kind of red, as I don't think I look like a country jake, for he laughed and told me the bank was on the corner of Crocodile Avenue and Orange street, so I laughed, too, to see how quickly he made a joke

out of it; and then he told me correctly, and I took his letter."

"Did you find the place?" asked Loo, who wished with all his heart that he might be a business man, too, instead of a "lame noodle," as he called himself.

"Sure!"

"How long did it take you?" Lona asked.

"Oh, just a few moments, for I ran all the way, because he said he was in a great hurry for the answer."

"That's right, son; do everything you're told to do willingly, and as quickly as possible, and you'll find it a big help to success. A man or boy who is always watching the clock or tries to render just the service paid for generally remains near the foot of the ladder of success; while others, more earnest in their work, soon get near if not entirely to the top," Dr. Alvoyd said wisely.

And unconsciously Lee followed his father's advice and made warm friends in the large establishment where he was employed that summer;

for to the frequent question, "Alvoyd, do you think you could do so and so?" his quick answer, "I can try, sir," was always willingly accepted and gratefully remembered to his benefit.

On Saturday, as he came down in the elevator, with his first salary deep in his pocket, his eyes were fairly dancing with pride. "I'll give it all to Mama," he thought fondly, and then another idea popped into his mind, and he raced up Market street planning and smiling away for dear life. The "idea" took bodily shape in a dainty lace-pin for his mother, and he selected a tiny silver pansy, with a turquoise dewdrop on its largest petal. It cost a whole dollar, but Lee thought lovingly, "It's the first money I've ever earned, and *she'll* keep it forever." For his father he selected an iron paper weight in the form of a skull; for Lona he bought "Six Girls"—"a fine story," the saleslady told him; so he took her advice for Loo's gift also, and carried the invalid an Indian story, "Talking Leaves." Lolly would read both, so he took her a print of the

lovely head of the Christ Child in the Temple. It was in a carved frame and was really the sweetest gift of all. Althea, who mothered everything from Dr. Alvoyd to a penny china doll, was bought a darling blue-eyed bisque baby with long brown curls; and smiling gaily at his gayer taste he tucked a bright bandanna into his pocket for Mammy. The "salary" had dwindled down to one lone dollar by the time Lee started for home, but he was so happy over the thought of his merry surprise that the fact never bothered him at all; and he arrived, just before tea, much in the manner of a summer Santa Claus.

Merry laughter and loving smiles greeted his thoughtfulness, and the joy of the evening of "Lee's first pay-day" was never forgotten by the Alvoyd household. The girls thought what he had done was very nice, and with an elegant air of a grown-up; and Lona's lively wits began casting about for something similar to do, and I'm afraid she would have surprised the family with some wild prank if her plans had not been dis-

covered and the homely fact laid before her very gently and lovingly, "that boys may work and girls may sweep." So her vacation was spent in helping her mother and Lolly and Althea keep home bright and cheery all day long for Loo, and in the evening for their father and Lee, who, while he never admitted it, found the "place" a little irksome during the long warm day and was beginning to show the strain of such unusual hours and be a bit pale, when a happy chance was given him to enjoy, as only a nature-loving boy can, the last two weeks of the summer.

Max came in one evening with a grand air of mystery and privately asked Dr. and Mrs. Alvoyd for permission to invite Lee on a camping trip through the Adirondacks. Ten of his classmates were going and Lee's teacher, Professor Baker, a close friend of Redney White's father, was to act as guide, and they had sent him to invite Lee.

"Oh, let me go, dad," Lee said quietly when he was told. "I'll take good care of myself and—

and—will look after Max," he finished in a roguishly serious way.

"I'm willing," Dr. Alvoyd said with an approving nod to his wife, whose flushed face showed her anxiety at the thought of Lee's going away alone. And after a moment's silence he urged cheerfully, "The life in the open air, and the restful green of the forest is just what he needs to tone him up for the coming winter's work. I think we can trust the boys to go—don't you, dear?"

"I'd trust them to go to the Pole," laughed Mrs. Alvoyd. "It's the coming back whole that I worry about," and she looked at Lee with loving distress.

"Oh, Mama, 'don't cross the bridge until you get on the other side,' as the French woman said," laughed Lee who saw by the looks exchanged between his parents that the trip was his.

So it was, and three days later he left with the party of campmates for the mountains in the

North. Early in the afternoon of the second day after leaving home, they left the train and drove in a rough wagon ten miles to the heart of the hills.

By eight o'clock the camp was in order: one small tent for Professor Baker, and three larger ones for the boys. Joe Adolphus was chief of the kitchen department, which was a large space between eight pine trees, and had a brick stove in the center; and although the boys had had supper in the village at five o'clock the ride through the mountains gave them a fine excuse to "love Joe forever" when he proposed coffee and sandwiches. What fun they had building, not only the kitchen, but also the two beacon fires a short distance from the tents, and skirmishing off for wood through the dark, weird forests wrapt in the silence of night.

"Boys," shouted Redney at sunrise next morning, "old High passed through about midnight, just as I was putting some green branches over the fires, and he said that 'two herd of deer were

galavantin' in the mountains somewhar. Half a dozen of the trappers have seen their trails, but nary a one has caught a glimpse of an antler.'"

"It is very early for deer in these diggings," observed Professor Baker delightedly, as the boys bounced out of the tents all talking and laughing at once, for the thought of being in the very same *State* with wild deer was enough to set them all crazy with high hopes of bagging some of the wonderful game.

They were *all* to *see* four stragglers of one herd, and the reason that no venison graced their board was the subject of an everlasting joke; for they decided to act independently and try to bring down at least one of the beauties. So just before sunrise on the fourth morning Lee, whose mind was filled with but one thought,—deer, deer, deer,—took his rifle and stole away. He crossed the creek a half mile below camp, and then made his way toward the top of a neighboring peak, whose springs, paths, and crags were in plain view of the heights above Camp White.

"I noticed yesterday," Lee thought as he trudged along, "how much more tender the grass and bushes seemed over here than on our side; and I'll wager the leaders of those herds know it too, and will be coming to feast some time or other;" and he made his way higher and higher and was just going to give up, for the sun was now bright, when climbing out on a bowlder overlooking the valley between him and the camp, his heart nearly stood still with joy—for there on a small plateau just beyond him four beautiful deer were calmly grazing: a doe, two stags, and one lovely little fawn. Lee was lost to all other thoughts but their wonderful beauty, until a distant hello and volley of shots from the hill beyond suddenly brought him to a sense of what he should do; but the firing, while too distant to harm them, startled the gentle creatures, and, when they saw Lee not twenty yards away, they stood as still as he did, eying him in terror; but as he made no move to harm them they sprang swiftly back into the mountain wilds and were

lost to him forever—for though he took careful aim, he could not shoot, and he never could tell why—even when the boys who had witnessed the whole scene from the hills above the camp teased him nearly frantic.

He was white and shaking when he came lagging into the tent an hour later, but he met the unmerciful chaffing with much spirit and declared hotly,

"I'm not a muff—and I don't believe you would have killed one of those handsome fellows either. You can laugh and tease until Kingdom Come, because I think it's awful funny, too; but I just could not shoot at those beauties. Anyway, I bet I wouldn't have hit 'em," he finished, almost hopefully, as he sat down on a box.

"Well, if that's the kind of a shot you are, we'll build a barn and let you practise at the sides; for unless you're sitting on their backs, you'll never again get nearer wild fallow deer," teased Mort Dawson roguishly.

Professor Baker told them later that Lee had

had a severe case of buck fever — but the boys called it "chicken heart," and if Lee hadn't made so much fun of the occurrence himself I'm afraid he would have lost most of the sport of the trip; for at each meal some one of the lads would ask plaintively for venison; or complain each night upon retiring that they had no antlers upon which to hang their caps; or observed with great grumbling that a deerhide hung before the door of one of the tents would have kept the mosquitoes out. So Lee decided to try again, and started out before sunrise on the morning they broke camp, and covered himself with much glory by a real act of heroism; and ever after, at the mention of "Lee's deer," he checkmated all tormenting with a glance at his watch-chain, which was adorned with a tiny—but that's ahead of the story. This time, Lee took the peak to the west of their hill, so at least the boys would not have a poppy show of his soft-heartedness, and after an hour's climb was quietly making his way around the summit, when, suddenly, the ter-

rified screams of children reached his ears and racing along in the direction of the sound he clambered over a crag, and nearly died of fright —for standing at the foot of a low-branched pine tree, up which a twelve-year-old boy and girl were struggling, stood a half-grown *bear!*

Lee leaned against the rock in terror, but the animal was making an attempt to climb after the children, and while all the blood rushed to his heart the boy stole slowly forward and discharged his rifle into its back. With the echo of its roar of rage and pain in his ears Lee quickly reloaded and as the beast turned and came toward him, he calmly fired straight at its eyes, and with a pitiful little moan the bear fell! Lee's sensations were first intense horror—then wild relief and joy at his preservation.

"*Now* what will they say," went ringing through his mind; and while he tremblingly helped the children out of the tree he learned that they belonged to the High family, and had been helping to fill an order for twenty quarts of

blackberries, but had scarcely picked a pint before Bruin appeared. He was greatly enraged to find them meddling with his meal, and nearly frightened them to death by flying at them with a growl of anger. They had not waited to dispute about it, but had blindly taken to the tree, with every prospect of shortly providing him with a tender breakfast when Lee's appearance saved them. But while he listened to their terrified story, and gave them plenty of sympathy—his own knees were still shaking violently! He was casting about in his mind for a way to get back to the boys with the wonderful spoil. But the children were so shaken and frightened that he felt he just must take them home, and so he did; and was rewarded by their grandfather going back with him and, by the aid of a stout rope, helping him drag his glory into camp.

The boys laughed heartily when Lee's absence had been discovered; but when seven o'clock arrived and he had not returned for breakfast, they all began to share Professor Baker's and Max's

uneasiness and had just decided to megaphone through the hills, when wild shouts down the trail brought them out helter-skelter—and the sight of Lee posing proudly upon the side of a dead *bear* produced a perfect cyclone of amazement and joy. For there was glory a-plenty in that one poor beast for the whole outfit, and "muffie" was voted the hero of the trip, on the spot. So that is why any mention of the deer "that Lee didn't shoot" brought his hand to the tiny silver-mounted nail of a young bear that he did; and Lona ever cherished a handsome rug of fine black hair, with cruel head, open jaws and strong claws, that Lee presented to her upon his return from that glorious camping trip in the mountains.

CHAPTER IX.

TULLIA'S STORY.

"TULLIA, Reverend Mother wishes to see you," Madam Roberta said one day, shortly after class had been called, as she glanced from a note one of the first *cour* girls had brought her; and Tullia quietly left the room, little dreaming how different her life would be before she entered it again. A half hour later she appeared at the door with a white face and trembling voice to ask for Lona. Lona hurried out in great alarm and exclaimed anxiously as Tullia, crying bitterly, threw her arms about her,

"Why, what has happened, deary?"

"Oh, Lona, Lona! Reverend Mother says there is a gentleman in the parlor who says he is my brother—and I'm afraid to go down, and she wants to send for Father and—and what shall I

do?" gasped Tullia, ringing her hands in hysterical nervousness, for the shock was so great that just now she felt neither joy nor sorrow—only great fear. "Oh, what if it's true—and he is my *own* brother and will love me, as Lee does you, I would almost die from joy—but—oh—I'm afraid to go—down," she sobbed, clasping Lona tightly again and hiding her face on her shoulder, when the gentle Superior came into the hall.

"My dear," said the nun kindly, taking one of Tullia's shaking hands in hers, "the young gentleman down stairs has given me undoubted proofs of his relationship to you. He says he knows your father is out of the city, and that he feels most kindly towards him—but he wants to see you, my child, and you have nothing to fear—for Andre is a brother you can be proud of. I'll go down with you, or better still, Lona," she continued, noticing Tullia's nervous clasp of her friend's hand. "Come, dear!" and holding tightly to her on one side and Lona on the other,

Tullia went tremblingly down to the parlor and paused fearfully for a moment outside the door, then standing bravely erect she opened it—and in an instant closed it gently behind her.

As she entered, a low, broken cry of, "Little sister! Little sister!" rang through the quiet hall, and a tall man with his hands held out to her came quickly forward; after one brief glance in which all her fears fled, Tullia ran straight into his arms and clung to him pitifully, sobbing out her loneliness and love in sorrowful little phrases of affection.

"Oh, Andre! I've wanted *some one* so! Oh, please try to love me! Please!"

"My little one! I've wanted you too—so much —so much!" and the deep voice trembled with wistfulness.

And there, in the dimness of the convent parlor, the brother and sister clung to one another and freed their hungry hearts in words of tenderness and loving pledges of devotion.

"I don't believe you know what I look like,"

Andre laughed finally, holding her off at arm's length that he might see what *she* really looked like.

Tullia smiled up into the kind gray eyes that were regarding her very tenderly and she saw, through a mist of tears, a splendid, broad shouldered boy of about twenty-three, with a clear, bright face, soft dark hair and deep, grave eyes that were dim just then, for what Andre saw in the young girl before him made him say sorrowfully,

"*I* remember our mother, dear, and you are much like her. See," he said, slipping a small picture into her hand, and Tullia, looking down, for the first time in her life saw the face of her mother.

The poor child passionately pressed the faded picture to her lips, and bitter tears fell on the little case, as she whispered,

"Oh, mother, mother, you have come at last!"

"Look, dear! See how much you are like her!" and Andre led her to the light, and Tullia

saw a sweet, girlish face with soft, happy eyes that gazed straight into hers with a look of gentle greeting, as though the smiling lips would say, "Little daughter, little daughter, here I am—now be happy!"

"Andre, how did I ever lose you *all?*" Tulia asked tremulously, kneeling beside him with the picture pressed against her cheek.

"It is not a long story, dear, nor a very strange one," he replied, putting his arm about her fondly. Both our parents were orphans, each the very last of two old French families; and I was nearly seven years old when father died suddenly of fever, only a few weeks after you were born, and mother died, too. She was so beautiful, and frail and gentle; I remember well how he loved her, and called her his *"fleur-de-mon-coeur.'"*

"Flower of my heart!" echoed Tullia softly.

"So she was, and when that grand heart perished, the flower faded—and you and I were left alone."

"But even then, Andre, we were together," Tullia whispered almost reproachfully.

"Yes, dear; but we were placed in an asylum and in the very first week I was adopted by a wealthy lady from New York, and I remember, as though it were yesterday, how I begged her to take you, too, or leave me; but though she refused, she did it gently and kindly; and I learned later it was because her husband disliked babies, but *did* want a boy of my age, and you see, dear, the authorities could give them the history of my birth which, with my childish beauty, made me all they desired. But before I left a nun took me in to where you lay in a little basket, sleeping as peacefully as a baby princess might; and after I had kissed you good-bye again and again she took me into her arms and let me cry my aching baby-heart out against her pitying breast, as she whispered over and over, 'I'll take good care of little sister, Andre, and when you're a man you can come back and get her,' and comforted by that great hope I went into my new life. But I never

forgot you, dear, and my adopted mother wrote about you frequently until I was nearly ten, when she died suddenly, and I went abroad with my father and stayed until I was sixteen. I wrote again and again to the asylum, but in some inexplicable way, through a fire and changes in the Order perhaps, they had lost all trace of you, and it was not until two months ago, when I went to Savannah myself and hunted up the nun who had promised to take care of you, for I remembered her name, Sister Serina; and found that she was on a mission in San Francisco. I wrote to her and at the end of the month she replied that 'she remembered us very well and that you had been adopted by a Philadelphia family named Perry.' I came straight here and called upon many families of that name before I found your Mr. Perry, but learning that he was the right one and out of the city I could wait no longer but went to the house and found from the old woman there where you were, and here I am—so thankful, darling, that I have found you, that I could pro-

claim my joy from the house-tops—and thus thank God for guiding me aright," and Andre kissed her passionately.

They talked quietly for hours and decided that he was to go home with her, for Tullia knew that Mr. Perry expected to return in the early evening; and that they would abide by his decision as to what their future should be.

When Madam Roberta opened the door, just before twilight, the happiness of the two young faces filled her heart with thanksgiving, for she loved Tullia dearly and the gentle girl's future had long worried the nuns.

"Well, little girl," she said, seating herself on the sofa beside them, and taking Tullia's hand, "what are you going to do with a big brother, now that you have one?"

"Oh, Madam, I'm so afraid I'll find it all a dream, that I just want to hold him tight and not move for fear I'll wake up," and Tullia pressed the nun's hand fervently, sure that the kind heart understood and sympathized with her in this

strange, sweet experience, common in romances, but so seldom met with in real, every-day life.

Andre confided his plans to the Superior, and she heartily agreed that the only course opened to them was straightforward honesty with Mr. Perry, and that in view of all he had done for Tullia they must abide by his will in the matter of her future. She kissed the girl very tenderly when she bade them good night and whispered comfortingly.

"Trust in God, dear, and all will be well!"

"I will, Madam," Tullia answered bravely, "I'll do what is *right,* no matter how hard it may be, to thank Him for giving me Andre."

Our Father, who is in Heaven, has never forsaken one of his children when they, deep in their hearts, resolve to do right, "no matter how hard it may be," and Tullia's fears were quickly turned to happiness when Mr. Perry told them that evening that his one earthly wish was to return to the Vermont village where his boyhood had been spent, and where two bachelor brothers

lived alone in the country homestead; but he had stifled the desire on account of Tullia, who, he knew, wished to finish her education at the convent where she loved every crook and cranny; and he loved her with the unselfishness that parents have for "own children," and so had never made known his desire.

"I'll give her to you, Andre," said the old man brokenly, as he lovingly caressed Tullia's bonny curls, "if you'll let her come to see me sometimes and let me have her when I come down here—I'm old and lonely since my wife went Home, and our little French daughter has been the one ray of brightness in a long life made weary by sorrow and losses."

"Father," Andre said earnestly, generously giving the solitary old man the title he loved from Tullia, "you may have her whenever you wish, and when you come back to the city our little home will welcome you, always as master—as well as best friend."

So in one short month Tullia, with tender tears

and sad heart, said good-bye to the little house she had called "home" so long and to the kind old man who had been the only one in the whole wide world on whom she had had any claim; but he was so happy in the thought of really going back to Greenwood, and her joy over Andre, whom he fondly called "son," that the hardest part of parting was spared them all.

Lona was a great comfort during all that eventful month, for the whole Alvoyd family rejoiced in Tullia's happiness and thought Andre "splendid."

"Both the lives of those children have been very serious, and that grave chap seems more like her father than her brother," Dr. Alvoyd said when they were discussing Tullia's story one Sunday evening while they waited for her for tea.

"Here's Maxie," announced Althea from the window; and Max came in merry and sunshiny as he always was now; for life was pleasant to the boy that fall. His home was very happy; he

loved the work of the profession he had chosen in accordance with his father's wishes, and he had made so many friends among his classmates that every day brought some new pleasure: for he never forgot those lonely months at Court Ledge before he found Althea, and many struggling, solitary lads at Penn were assisted without their knowledge by his great friendliness, which meant larks at his beautiful home, and to Freshmen and Juniors at college a "lark" means but one thing—a spread; because the majority are only overgrown boys who leave home to become men, and they miss the household pettings and spoilings, though far be it from "men" to acknowledge it.

"Well, Lona, how are your friends with the romance?" he laughed, after greeting them all fondly, for his heart was anchored strongly in the little house and much of his free time was spent there.

"Here they are now, and I'm so glad you're here too," Lona answered happily, for just then

she heard Tullia's gentle ring, and they all went down to meet the new friends.

Max liked Andre immediately, and when the conversation very naturally turned upon his happy reunion with his sister said in his earnest, boyish way, "I know just how you feel. I had something of the same experience when Dr. Alvoyd gave me back my mother," and he told of that happy time when "Maudechen" left her invalidism and gradually became an active little woman again. Andre soon felt the cordial spirit Max had always found in the twin's home, and was soon telling his plans and hopes as freely as the boy himself would have done.

"Tullia and I have some very bright air-castles that will really be built this week; the foundation of one was laid this morning when we went to look over a cottage and found it very satisfactory," he said, with a smile to his sister.

"Oh, Lona, it's the dearest little place with five rooms — just like a doll's house," Tullia exclaimed happily.

"Where is it?" asked Loo.

"Across the street from Alexander Hamilton's homestead in Woodlawn; and from the west windows we have the loveliest view of a bend in the river!"

"It will seem as though you were playing house, won't it?" laughed Lona, who thought everything about this experience charming.

"I told Andre this morning that by the time it is all finished and we are living there in a 'really home' I'll feel like I'd died and gone to heaven," and for the first time Tullia's eyes did not glance about the cozy library with a pitiful look of longing that had always made Mrs. Alvoyd's heart ache.

"Oh, Mother, I have the best news to tell you!" she went on, crossing to where Mrs. Alvoyd, who had long ago taken her into her heart, was resting; and while the others talked with Andre she poured into the motherly ears the splendid news that Mr. Perry was insisting upon their taking most of his furniture.

"He says it was all intended for me anyway, and that he only wishes to take some special keepsakes, and then what we don't want he is going to send to the Little Sisters of the Poor and the Salvation Army. So that will give us plenty to make the little house comfy; and father has put two hundred dollars in the bank for us 'against a rainy day.' Then Andre has a position in a new law firm, you know, and will make sixty dollars a month. So, with only a small rent to pay don't you think I ought to be able to manage?" she asked with beseeching earnestness, as though in the answer would lay all the possibility of her future happiness — that Andre's confidence in trusting her to manage the house alone had not been misplaced.

Mrs. Alvoyd petted the curly head leaning against the side of the couch, and said comfortingly, though seriously,

"You are very young, dear, to undertake the care of a house; but with old Ann coming in every day to do the hard work, and with me here

to advise and help you any way I can, I think you will sail along with constantly flying colors. Don't undertake too much; have a special work for each day, for you can't work up all your strength, and study up all your strength, too; but must divide time so that most of it is given to study, for while in three years, through Andre's success in his practice, you may not need a diploma, I would keep that goal in view and win it for the honor of obtaining it rather than as a means to a livelihood, as you had expected. There are so many possible honors open to a young lawyer that you must always be prepared to fill any position by reason of your brilliant mind as well as womanly graces. And for the time being, Tullia, go slowly, paying everything as you go; for there is no greater misfortune on earth than debt, that once started grows like wildfire, no matter how much water, in the way of economical resolutions, you may apply. Buy what you can pay for and what you can't — go without."

Just then the bell rang for tea, and with a hearty kiss of gratitude and a whisper of thankfulness Tullia quietly joined the others.

My! what a merry time they had that evening, planning for the holiday season, which was rapidly approaching; and after a whispered conference with Tullia, Andre announced that on Thanksgiving night they would give a housewarming with a little dinner at six P. M.

The two weeks flew by with the speed that was meant by the author of,

> "How lightly falls the foot of Time
> That only threads on flowers,"

and with true sorrow Tullia said good-bye to Mr. Perry; and then, with much help from Ann, his old housekeeper, and with many timely visits from Mrs. Alvoyd and the girls, the "Snuggery," as Lee nick-named the little house, was ready, and Tullia had a home of her own at last!

The house itself looked like an English baby left to the care of German nurses, for it was a tiny Queen Ann cottage in a little garden of its

own, that was shadowed by substantial red brick houses on both sides. A wide, low porch ran all across the front and from it the door opened directly into the "saloon," as the proud young owners called the wide room which extended the width of the house, with a pretty bay-window at one end and a coy fireplace at the other. The furniture was all old-fashioned walnut, black with age and wear; but a writing desk, bookcase, table and sofa did look well against the dainty new Japanese matting that Andre had insisted upon; while four arm-chairs and two light rockers, placed comfortably about, gave the room a simple homelike air that filled Tullia's heart with a calm peace, which was deeper than most girl's raptures of joy.

The Alvoyds had sent a little home-gift the day before Thanksgiving — a Rosemont flower-stand like Lona's; and they had generously given half their ferns and roses, and it filled the bay-window with a double sweetness, their own, that God had given them, and the lesson of neighborly love and

generosity. Two pretty water-colors, the "Grand Canal of Venice," and the "First Christmas Eve," framed in delicate gilt ovals, had been sent, with eight ruffled-net curtains, by the nuns; and with the small picture of their mother over which Tullia had draped a spray of scarlet ivy leaves, added the dainty touches the room needed to keep it from being somber.

The dining-room and kitchen were cozy and simple, and were to witness many gay revels of the young people who came for the first time that Thanksgiving night and who, for many years to come, were to find that the "Snuggery" could supply every need — whether they came in joy or sorrow. For each was to have as much as comes into every life.

The two little rooms upstairs were too plain to call forth much notice, and while the boys adjoined to the "saloon" after the grand tour, the girls helped Ann with dinner. It proved a great success, for with the simple fare Mrs. Alvoyd had advised went a splendid feast of

merriment, laughter, and frolics. Max ended the gaieties with a toast that went straight to all the young hearts for they all believed it, and were happier by their faith,

> Life is a golden crown, in which
> The brightest jewel is—HOME!

CHAPTER X.

CHARITY.

As the interests of the older children broadened into new fields and friendships, Althea became their parents' loving little comrade; always at home, and always ready to trot on the many little missions that came up every few moments in a large household. She went to school when the weather was pleasant, but on cold or stormy days she reigned supreme in the little park house.

"My darling," Mrs. Alvoyd said, coming into the sitting-room one stormy day in December and finding Althea making paper dolls, "I wonder if I could trust you to go to the drugstore down at the next corner. Mammy must have some soda and I don't like to send her out in the snow, she's so old."

"Ob torse I tan go," Althea answered sweetly, and promptly putting down the scissors was ready in a few moments.

"Now run as fast as you can, dear, for I will watch you from the window," and Mrs. Alvoyd little dreamed what a spectacle was to meet her astonished eyes when she did see Althea again; as she watched the small muffled figure until it turned the corner, drumming idly on the frosty panes with her thoughts in far-away Rosemont, until several rapidly moving little figures caught her eye, and in an instant she recognized Althea's bare golden head, for the little girl was running toward home leading by the hands two other children; and as they came nearer she saw that one of them, a tiny mite of about three, had on Althea's coat and hood while the other, a bit taller, was like her, coatless and bareheaded.

"Oh, Mama, tum quick," wailed Althea, blue with cold but bright-eyed from excitement, as her mother reached the front door and threw it open, "dese poor 'ittle dirls are all told and hungry—oh, Mama!" and Althea's misery was too deep for words.

Mrs. Alvoyd stared at the trio in amazement

for an instant, but only one, as in it she saw what Althea with all her innocent baby pity knew nothing of: a story of hunger, freezing and poverty that was plainly written on the pinched little faces raised so pitifully to hers; for with the knowledge that the children of the streets seem born with they feared that the "Missus" instead of wrapping them in warm coats and coaxing them along with loving promises of help, would harshly order them away, and the sweet hope of comforts that had come to them through Althea's impetuous kindness would fade away, as it had done so often before. But Mrs. Alvoyd's answer to her distressed "Oh, Mama" and their own looks of appeal was a tender exclamation of pity, as she said gently, "You poor little souls, come right in!" And in, oh, so few moments they were toasting before Mammy's kitchen fire and drinking deep draughts of delicious warm milk to wash down a great feast that the "Missus" called "bread and butter." Althea hovered about with anxious fear for their comfort, until under

plea of needing assistance Mrs. Alvoyd drew her into the dining-room to ask with tender concern,

"Now, little daughter, where did you find those children?"

"Mama, dey was crying in the door of dat big building, and I thought dey was begger dirls, like in Lona's book, so I axed dem if dey was hungry —and oh, Mama, the 'ittle baby said 'colda! colda!' and the odder one just laid right down and cried and cried; so I told 'em you'd make 'em all right — dey should just tum home with me," and Althea looked up at her mother with such loving trust that Mrs. Alvoyd kissed her and said lovingly,

"You did just right, my darling; and I *will* make them happier."

And in a short while two warmly-clad little figures walked down the front steps with a big basket that had "six meals o' wittles" in it as Bridgie was heard to whisper to Nellie, while they watched Mammy put meat and bread and tea and eggs into the packages they were to take

"hum," where Mrs. Alvoyd by careful questioning learned the direst need existed.

"Ask your mother to come up to-morrow, dear, and I am sure we can help her very much," she had said just before they left; but Bridgie answered hopelessly: "Sure, and she can't lave the twins: they're only four days old and they cry all the time as it is; sure, they'd yell themselves deaf if she'd lave 'em." But the hopefulness and joy in the child's voice as she promised to come herself was a whole Thanksgiving proclamation of its own, and Mrs. Alvoyd was satisfied that Althea's first act of charity was greatly needed as well as richly deserved.

The twins and their father laughed merrily when told of Althea's "find" and prophesied she'd discover the whole family, camped on the front steps in the morning; but she didn't, though at nine o'clock Bridgie and Nellie came back, and waved gaily when they saw their fair-haired little patroness watching for them at the window. It was only the beginning of a friendship that

had devoted love and rare gratitude on one side, and great charity on the other, for Althea never forgot them, but saw great possibilities of help for her little waifs in every goody or comfort she could obtain for them.

"Babes, I'm afraid Santa Claus won't be able to add very much to our tree this year," Mrs. Alvoyd said regretfully one evening a short time before Christmas, as they were talking over ways and means to make it a happy feast, for they knew it was to be very different from any other they had ever known.

"Well, Mama, I have a whole box of the decorations we brought to Rosemont last year, and they will be more than enough for a small tree, for Papa said he was going to have one for Althea," Loo said thoughtfully.

"Yes, indeed," answered his mother, "and at first we were going to let each of you ask two friends in to see it, and Aunty Maudechen and I would have some little remembrance ready for them; but I think we ought to give this Christmas

to Althea and let her invite ten of her little neighborhood playmates. Have them in after church for a jolly time until dinner. Don't you think so?"

"Indeed I do!" agreed Lona heartily, and the others hastily added their consent, for the twins never forgot that "Allie" was not really theirs, and were always willing to do whatever would make her love them as much, when she grew older, as she did then—for Althea seldom referred to her "little mama" now, and she truly was the life of the household, with her gentle sunshiny ways and tender heart.

"Tell her to-night, Mama," pleaded Lolly, as they heard her pattering up the steps; but Dr. Alvoyd called their mother to his study just then, and Althea came in singing softly to her doll.

"What a queer Christmas this will be," commented Loo grumpily, kicking up his heel, a feat that he thought at one time would make him perfectly happy if he could ever be sure of performing it again.

"It will be very different from last year, of course; but first one thing and then another is different in this world—so you might just as well be prepared for all kind of changes," agreed Lee philosophically.

"Oh, if Max and Andre and Tullia come over for the evening it's all I want," and Lona sighed happily over the names of her friends who were very dear to her.

"If you have them, won't you ask Gay too?" pleaded Lolly anxiously, for the friendship between sunshine and whirlwind had become very close, and Dr. Alvoyd saw, with a thankful heart, that the lively little tomboy was doing more for his timid girl than all the medicine in Christendom.

"If you do I bet she tips over the tree or kills herself eating painted fruit," laughed Lee, though he half feared that he would win the wager.

"Tan't I have Bridgie and Nellie?" asked Althea in a moment of silence that followed Lee's dire predictions.

"Heavens, kid, they'd eat the tree!" exclaimed Loo fearfully.

"Allie, those kids would die from the shock if they were to see a real live Christmas tree!" echoed Lee.

"No, dey wouldn't, Lee; please let 'em see ours," and Althea's sweet eyes looked up at him pleadingly.

"Well, little sister, Santa Claus just sent word that we are getting too big for him to bother with; but, that if you will invite ten little girls to come over Christmas morning he'll put something on the tree for every one of them. And he's going to send a special Christmas to Bridgie and Nellie so you won't have to bother about that," Lolly announced, twirling Althea around joyfully.

"Who can I ask, then?" Althea asked calmly, as the twirl ended on the couch.

"Whoever you want," answered Lona.

"Really and truly?" persisted the little girl.

"Why, yes, darling, whoever you wish, Mama

said," Lona answered kindly, little thinking how literally kind-hearted Althea was going to take the permission.

For after the very jolliest Christmas tree surprises early Christmas morning she played with her pretty new dolls and many simple gifts, until her mother told her that it was time for church; and as all the rest of the family had gone to midnight Mass, she was allowed to run across the park to the nine o'clock children's service at the cathedral. And after seeing her safely over, Lee went on out to Max.

At a quarter to ten Mrs. Alvoyd took up her station at the window to watch for Althea's return, and had just begun to wonder what was keeping the child, when a troop of perfect little ragamuffins suddenly turned into the gate and from their midst Althea appeared, smiling bravely into the amazed faces of the family, who had come from all corners of the house at their mother's first cry of astonishment, as she said earnestly, "Mama, you said I could devite any-

body I wanted—and I wanted 'ittle dirls what Santa Claus touldn't go to see!"

"Certainly, my darling," Dr. Alvoyd answered hastily; for the ten were showing signs of flight, and before the looks of keen disappointment had really settled on their expectant faces, he had the whole party in the parlor, screaming with delight and surprise over the pretty tree.

"Where did you find the children this time, Althea," Mrs. Alvoyd asked laughingly, as Althea followed her into the dining-room for a drink.

"Why, Mama, I just told the Sister what Lona told me—that I tould have anybody I wanted to my Twistmas tree, and I fought dey would like to come most more than Lelia and Cele, 'cause dey have drate big Christmas trees themselves; and Sister said, 'I fink so too, little Good-heart,' so I bringed them," and Althea finished her simple explanation with a happy laugh.

"You brought ten of our blessed Lord's very own little children, dearest; and we will give them a merry Christmas, because it will please Him so

much; and will make you happy whenever you remember it, for it was a beautiful thought. Now let's go back and help papa and the girls make them happy."

But the children needed no assistance to enjoyment, and they came toward Althea with one grand rush as she appeared in the doorway, each trying to show her the richness they had received.

"Say, kid, look at this apple," shouted a tall, thin child, "sure, it's pink as a birry—and candy all through!"

"Look at me bird!" screamed a mite of four, as she held up to view a crystal parot, with its gay tail nearly sucked off.

One little girl, who had been stumping about with a crutch, had found the handsome puppy Max sent Loo, and was discovered back of the tree pouring forth all the love of her little heart upon his silky head. "You kape the party and give me the dog," she proposed, thinking *that* compromise would surely be accepted; but Loo was set upon the little fellow, too, and I'm afraid

one of their hearts would have been broken, if Max and Lee had not happened in just then; and when they understood the visit from the "four hundred," started in with a will to help the good cause along. Max privately promised Loo *two* puppies if he would let the lame child have the one she had tied her love to. And then, making Dr. Alvoyd promise to keep the "debutantes" until his return, he slipped away, and no one knew just where he obtained them, but he returned shortly, and each tot received a gay-colored hood, mittens, and warm rubber boots. That seemed the finishing touch, for not even the stockings of candy, nuts, and fruit that Lolly gave them to carry home produced the shouts of joy Max's gifts had; and hurriedly arraying themselves in the new finery, with comical jests as to their appearances and the effect they would produce "to hum," they took a hasty departure, stamping off, goody-weighted and gift-laden—one mite, smaller than Althea, generously carrying the puppy, and two long, white stockings.

They turned at the gate and waved a farewell, and the happiness on their little, old faces filled the hearts of all, except Althea, with pity, for she saw nothing but their pleasure, and cried joyfully as they raced away, with the crippled child hobbling along in the rear.

"Oh, wasn't it good fun!"*

"Althea, you always were the cause of the happiest Christmasses we ever had, and this one is about the best yet!" said Lee, smiling at her with a face full of boyish devotion; for he did not mean it in praise as much as a tribute of real love, to show how deeply her sweet little act of charity had touched all their more thoughtless, older hearts.

"Althea, you are a true little Rose of Sharon," Max said softly, as the child came towards them with an air of shy embarrassment.

And I think that beautiful title was never more beautifully earned. If you meet my young people again depends upon whether you think so too.

* A true incident.

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